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# INTRODUCTION



Rome began with a simple people, devoted to family and tied to the land. For more than a millennium, they formed a community, their bonds strengthened by their belief in some greater power – their gods, their city, their republic, and eventually, their empire.

With a strong military, Rome imposed its will, rule, and culture on the territories it subsumed. The people of these territories identified themselves as Romans and accepted the fate of Rome as their own. Politicians, priests, generals, and emperors glorified - and often terrorized - the empire.

Wars, wrought by military and political differences, were constant on the frontiers and within the city. Some emperors ruled peaceably, others brutally. The government of Rome was corrupt, marked by struggles for power and stature.

Rome achieved greatness beyond the scope of its military might. At its height, it was a rich, vibrant center, home to some of the world's most innovative minds. Romans saw themselves as an elite group with a god-given mandate for superiority. That determination is described in a passage from the *Aeneid* by the Roman poet Virgil:

Ours is a race from ancestry

Enduring; to the streams we carry down

Our sons at birth, and with harsh frosty waves

We harden them. Our boys watch for the dawn

To go a-hunting, and they scour the woods;

To wheel their steeds their pastime, and to aim

Shafts with bent bow. But, patient in their toil,

Our youth to scanty ways of life inured With harrow tame  
the soil, or else in war Make towns to tremble.

In some ways, the story of ancient Rome is without end. It continues today as part of Western civilization's laws, language, artwork, and infrastructure. The Romans were so resourceful that Europeans still use roads they built and aquadecuts they carved into the land.

Some might argue that Rome's influence is still in evidence when it comes to corruption among office holders, high taxes, devalued currency, bureaucracy in government, persecution of the weak, and fighting among nations for territorial gain. All of these problems plagued the empire, no matter the century or the ruler.

The ideals, innovations, and ills that originated in Rome have shaped the world and have endured long after its mighty empire crumbled. Ancient Rome matters today because it not only provides a blueprint of the past, but it also opens a window on the future.



# 1

ORDAINED  
BY THE GODS



Little is known about the earliest Romans, except that they were farmers of Indo-European origin, possibly with roots in central Asia, and that they were a religious people. Romans, according to Roman historian Livy, believed their empire was ordained by the gods.

The religion upon which Rome was built influenced its government, in which priests held offices of high influence. Religion was entwined in the fabric of their daily lives, imprinted in the art and architecture that has survived the ages and is emulated still. Their belief system eventually evolved to embrace Christianity and form the basis of the Roman Catholic Church.

Before there was Rome, these farmers and shepherds worshipped spirits – called numina – that were responsible for the fate of various aspects of the natural world around them. Their gods were not made in their image, but were found in trees, rocks, fields, clouds, and animals. The numina had no sense of right or wrong, good or bad, and had no particular affection for people who worshipped them. Elaborate codes provided guidelines for paying tribute to the spirits and reaping the benefits of their favor.

Early on, these standards of spirituality were set by the oldest living male in each household – the pater familias – whose power was absolute. As Roman society became more communal, this job became the responsibility of the community's leader, or rex – Latin for king – then by committees of men who were acquainted with the wiles and whims of certain numina. Advisers to the rex on topics of religion were divided into two colleges – the pontifices, who specialized in religious law, and the augures, charged with interpreting omens.

The Roman ancestors looked to Vesta, guardian of the hearth, to keep their fires lit. The Lares protected their homes and property lines. The Penates kept watch over food, drink, oil, and other supplies. Early Romans often made offerings of wheat or grain garlands, honey cakes or honeycombs, grapes, wine, and incense to household gods. These tributes could be paid at any time and often by accident – any food that fell to the floor belonged to the gods. It was common during meals for bits of food to be tossed into the hearth for the Penates.

The Roman sky god, Jupiter came to the ancestors from an oak tree on Capitoline Hill. The spirit of Mars – best known throughout Roman history as the god of war – served in an agricultural capacity during this time. He was the force behind a good or poor harvest. Festivals in his honor were held in March – the month named for him – and October, which marked the beginning and end of the season for growing and warfare.

The god Mars plays a role in the legend of Rome's origin. The story begins with the Trojan hero Aeneas. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas is portrayed as one of the few Trojans not killed or enslaved during the fall of Troy. He was reputed to be the son of the goddess Venus and a Dardanian prince named Anchises. As Troy burned in the culmination of the Trojan War, Aeneas carried his elderly father to safety. He led a group called Aeneads, which, in addition to his father, included a trumpeter, a healer, a helmsman, and his son. They carried with them statues of Troy's household gods, the Lares and Penates, as they sailed away to establish a new civilization. Legend holds that the gods directed Aeneas and his people west, to a promised land that would become Rome.

The *Aeneid* portrays the Aeneads' voyage as turbulent, punctuated by brief but fierce storms placed in their path by the goddess Juno. After six years of wandering, the expedition made landfall at Carthage, where Aeneas fell under the thrall of a Carthagian queen named Dido. She proposed they marry and reign jointly over their united people. But, according to Virgil's account, the gods soon reminded Aeneas of his mission and destination, and within the year, he and his followers slipped off to Italy, incurring Dido's wrath.

In Italy, Aeneas married Lavinia, daughter of Latin king Latinius, and an alliance was formed between the Latins and the Aeneads. They settled near the coast, where Aeneas ruled a city he named Lavinium, after his wife. Aeneas was succeeded by his son Ascanius, who established a new city, Alba Longa, about twelve miles from the site that would later become Rome. It took its name from the nearby Alban Hills.

Four centuries and more than a dozen reigns later, King Numitor, a descendant of Aeneas, was overthrown by his

brother, Amulius. To ensure Numitor had no heirs, Amulius killed Numitor's son and forced his daughter, Rhea Silvia, to swear chastity as a Vestal Virgin. The legend states she became pregnant with twin sons, Romulus and Remus, and claimed the god Mars as the father. After their birth, the king imprisoned his niece and ordered a servant to kill her sons. But the servant showed mercy, and instead of slaying the children, he set them adrift on the river Tiber. When they washed ashore, a she-wolf, or lupa, suckled them until a shepherd named Faustulus found and raised them with his wife Acca Larentia. The imprisoned princess was, according to legend, rescued by the god of the Tiber, Tiberinus, and became his wife.

The twins grew into manhood and planned to build a new city on the Tiber, which had been their salvation. They would call it Rome.

The brothers resolved a dispute over the location of the city by looking to the birds for an omen, a process called augury. Remus faced one direction and counted six vultures circling overhead; Romulus turned the other way and claimed twelve - and the victory. "Go, proclaim to the Romans it is heaven's will that my Rome shall be the capital of the world," Romulus said. But Remus refused to accede to his brother. The two fought, and Remus was killed.

History tells us a different - albeit less colorful - story.

The Indo-European tribal ancestors of the Romans migrated first to central Europe, and then, around 1000 BCE, moved south along the Italian peninsula, conquering lands and incorporating vanquished peoples into their civilization. Among these were the Latins. Their home was Latium, a roughly 700-square-mile wedge bordered by the Tiber to the north with a large, dormant volcano at its center. Latium's dark, rich soil produced abundant crops, which sustained settlers and opened the region to expansion. Here, early Romans built a cornerstone for what would become the empire of their descendants.

A group of people called the Etruscans lived north of the Tiber. Not much is known about them - except through accounts of the early Romans' experience with them - because they left no literature or written history. They may

have come from Asia Minor around 800 BCE.

The Etruscans, however, played a vital role in the development of Rome, starting, perhaps most profoundly, with their religious influence.

The Romans may have been content to worship the numina, but as their borders expanded, so did their religious ideals. It started with their Etruscan neighbors, who had established a sort of theocracy in which society was governed by deities. The early Romans, for whom religion revolved around the family home and farm, began to embrace the Etruscans' notion of a larger religious community. In the course of bringing faith into the public arena, the Etruscans had constructed temples and devised elaborate rituals to honor their gods. They gave gods human forms and faces, which they recreated in statues and illustrated in images. All of this appealed to the Romans.

Individually, many Romans still worshipped the numina with shrines in their homes dedicated to the spirits of the hearth and harvest, and their old religion still featured public worship. A temple, among the finest in the Forum, paid tribute to Concord, the spirit of political harmony.

But the Etruscan gods were beginning to take prominence. When the Romans conquered the Etruscan city Veii in 396 BCE, their commanders brought back a wooden statue of the goddess Juno, which was given a lofty position on Rome's Aventine Hill.

Roman concepts of divination and prophecy also originated with the Etruscans, whose priests interpreted their deities' designs in nature – seeing messages in lightning strikes and abnormal births among cattle. A special significance was placed in the divine messages deciphered from the entrails of animals sacrificed to the gods. They could learn about the will of their gods, for example, from variations in the shape and size of an animal's liver and the pattern of its veins.

Many gods that the Etruscans introduced to the Romans later were absorbed into or took on attributes of the Greek deities. Jupiter became synonymous with the Greeks' Zeus, and Juno with his wife Hera. Venus, who began as a *numen* – of charm – evolved into Aphrodite. The goddess of the hunt (Artemis in

Greek lore) was Diana. The Etruscan god of war (Ares) was rechristened Mars. Similarly, the messenger god Hermes was known to Romans as Mercury. And Athena, goddess of wisdom, became Minerva. These new deities were adapted and assumed into the Roman pantheon.

This sudden proliferation of divinity meant Romans could choose which gods they placed on the highest pedestals. Temples rose up in honor of specific deities. Cults were created around gods of preference for powerful men, some with their own priests, who presided over elaborate rituals, tributes, and holiday celebrations. Rather than offer spiritual or moral guidance, priests were seen as conduits to the gods. They were expected to be experts in the rituals and liturgy that the gods found most pleasing, and in those that could incur their wrath. Over time, the priests' link to the gods gave them a power in Rome's political and social arenas – the Romans sought the gods' approval for everything from voyages to declarations of war.

Religion in Rome developed and evolved as the Romans expanded their influence and came in contact with new peoples and traditions. But in many essential ways, it stayed the same. Romans' relationship with their gods remained a practical arrangement: Worship and good deeds were offered in exchange for the gods' blessings. Faith was more ritualistic than spiritual. Its expression was more societal - starting with the family, then expanding into the village, city, state, and, finally, the empire - than personal.

The Romans' faith continued to develop over the next 1,000 years - but in a sense, the true religion of Rome, the ultimate object of Roman worship, the embodiment of Roman ideals, was Rome itself. Ordained by the gods, the city, the empire it amassed, and the emperors who ruled it, were held up as divine.



# 2

## EARLY ROMANS

The Etruscan civilization was vibrant, filled with song and dance, and well-governed, but it was also warlike.

With an economy tied to trade, the Etruscans introduced the early Romans to their neighbors along the eastern Mediterranean, who had much to offer in the way of culture and craft. Around 600 BCE, most of modern-day Italy – from the base of the Alps to the ankle of the boot-shaped peninsula, where Salerno is today – was prevalently Etruscan territory. The foot of the peninsula and Sicily belonged to the Greeks.

Thanks to Etruscan influence, early Romans abandoned their tribal ways and began to become townspeople. Though legend credits Romulus with naming the settlement that would grow into a city and then an empire, *Roma* was likely an Etruscan word. During its two centuries as a monarchy, Rome was ruled by three Etruscan kings.

## Monarchy

The first king was Romulus. Numa Pompilius, who claimed to have a personal relationship with a number of gods, succeeded him in 715 BCE. He is credited with establishing the priesthood of the Vestal Virgins, to which all of Rome eventually subscribed.

The Romans' Vesta – guardian of the hearth – was the inspiration for this sanctity. Her sacred flame came to symbolize the Roman state, and the Vestals were charged with keeping it lit. It burned perpetually in a circular temple located in the Roman Forum, where the Vestals, likely daughters of the king, conducted elaborate rituals. After 509 BCE, when the republic was established, Rome's influential citizens offered their daughters – some as young as six – as keepers of the flame. The period of service was thirty years and thought to be a great honor, though it imposed considerable restrictions on the women, who were sworn to chastity. The penalty for breaking this vow was to be locked in an underground chamber and left to perish. A Vestal's three decades in servitude were divided into the learning, practice, and teaching of her duties.

The last of the Etruscan kings, Tarquin the Proud, was the last king of Rome. Tarquin made a significant and lasting



contribution to the religion of Rome: He acquired the Sibylline Books.

The legend of how these texts came to Rome states that a prophetess – or sibyl – approached Tarquin with nine bound collections of prophecies, cryptic scraps inscribed in Greek hexameters, for sale at an exorbitant price. When the king sent her away, the prophetess set fire to three of the books and then returned, seeking the same payment for six. Tarquin again refused; three more volumes were burned. Perhaps sensing the same fate awaited the final three books, and by now curious to their contents, Tarquin accepted a third offer and paid the original price for the remaining texts.

The books were held in a vault beneath the Temple of Jupiter in the Roman Forum, and their prestige grew. They became a link to the gods in periods of conflict or tragedy. Instead of prophecies or omens, Romans believed the books gave advice on rousing the gods to stem plagues, famines, or turn the tide of war. Tight control was kept on the texts; only the Senate could grant access to them. At first, their care and custodianship was entrusted to two prominent Romans, or patricians. Eventually, that number grew – to ten, then fifteen members of a sacred college of priests. The appointment was for life, and those who held it were exempted from other public duties. Whether lost or destroyed deliberately, only fragments of the Sibylline Books survive today, offering few clues into their revelations.

Tarquin was violent and ruthless. At every opportunity, he undermined the Senate and disrespected Roman customs. Romans, growing disillusioned with their monarchy, revolted in 509 BCE. The spark that set off this revolution was apparently the king's son, Sextus, who raped a noblewoman named Lucretia, daughter and wife of prominent Roman citizens. Shamed, the woman stabbed herself to death. A conspiracy of four – led by Lucius Junius Brutus – incited the people to drive out Tarquin and his family.

## Republic

In the aftermath, the republic was established, with Brutus and a co-conspirator, Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, as its first consuls, an elected office of the highest order. Rex, the Latin word for king, became a term of disdain. The Romans still

respected a supreme authority, which they called imperium, but, with their consuls, they held that power in check and set up a system to elect two new authorities each year. No longer would they bow to a king for life. The shared rule between consuls offered protection against the tyranny they had come to expect from kings. Each consul had the power to veto the acts of the other, and a change in the law of Rome required both to sign the agreement.

The Roman Senate gained power and influence in the republic, as did two assemblies: the *comitia curiata*, which passed laws to be approved or dismissed by the consuls and tried judicial cases, and the *comitia centuriata*, comprised of soldiers who could declare war. Both bodies cast votes to elect high-ranking Roman officials, including the consuls. But in the early republic, this power was not evenly distributed. Only patricians – the term derived from *patres*, meaning fathers of the community – served in the Senate, and they dominated the assemblies meant to represent the entire citizenry. Another class of Romans, the plebeians – commoners employed as shopkeepers, craftspeople, and skilled or unskilled workers – were underrepresented.

A census separated the population of Rome into this rigid class structure. The struggle between the two – the rich and powerful versus the poor and powerless – is inextricably linked to every turning point in Roman history. While a few born into patrician families sought to champion the causes of the common people, plebeians had no recourse. A plebeian never could become a patrician. One of the widest divisions between these classes was in the practice of religion. Rituals reserved for patricians excluded the plebeians from certain responsibilities and ranks in society. Moreover, it was not possible to marry into the patrician class, so high-ranking public office was out of reach for plebeians. Despite this, they had citizenship, paid taxes, observed Roman customs and traditions along with their patrician counterparts, and served as soldiers.

As an enemy encroached on the city in 494 BCE, plebeian soldiers earned a victory for their class. Refusing to fight, the plebeians seceded from Rome, taking up residence on a hill along the banks of the Aniene River and forcing patricians into negotiations. From these talks came the establishment of the Tribune of the Plebes. All common people of Rome

formed a plebian assembly, which wielded power to elect tribunes, an office held for a year. These tribunes were untouchable, and anyone who harmed one was punishable by death. They gave people unprecedented influence over the Senate: Tribunes had the purview to veto any action deemed not in the interests of their constituents. Laws passed in this era narrowed the division of the classes – plebes and patricians could be married; and it became possible for a plebeian to rise to the office of consul. By 287 BCE, laws passed by plebeians did not require consent of the Senate.

## **Different Philosophies, Shared Values**

Romans were either Epicureans or Stoics – two divergent philosophies adopted from the Greeks.

Epicureans followed the teachings of Epicurus, a Greek philosopher who lived from 341 to 270 BCE. A materialist, Epicurus did not believe in divine intervention. By living a modest life and understanding the limits of one's desires, Epicureans achieved "pleasure," which they believed to be the greatest good, and gained knowledge of the workings of the world. With this came tranquility, defined as a freedom from fear and absence of pain.

Stoics, conversely, believed a virtuous life was the product of the forces of nature, achieved by establishing harmony with the world around them. Their goal was to be morally and intellectually perfect, which was only possible by separating reason from destructive emotions caused by lapses in judgment.

The philosophies had in common a sense of autarky – a reliance on one's self to fulfill personal desires. Epicureanism often was dismissed as hedonism, though its advocacy of a simple life as the key to pleasure contradicts this criticism. Stoics valued reason above material wealth, health, and position. The Athenian philosopher Zeno, upon whose teachings Stoicism was based, preached from a stoa, or porch – which is how the system of beliefs got its name – and attacked the instruments of religion - temples, statues, sacrifices, prayers – as nonessential. On this point, the Roman stoics diverged. They held up their gods as embodiments of universal reason and continued to worship them.

Philosophical and societal differences aside, Romans were fundamentally governed by the ways of the fathers – known as the *mos maiorum*. Their ancient values included a respect for strength and discipline. As a result, Romans remained loyal, industrious, frugal, and tenacious. They placed their gods, community, and family above all else.

The might of the *pater familias*, or head of household, eventually gave way to an authoritarian state and ultimately an all-powerful emperor, or *pater patriae*, father of the country. Public office, in service to Rome, merely was not an achievement in personal stature; it was an obligation to the greater family.

Cicero, one of Rome's greatest statesmen, wrote, "Those whom Nature has endowed with the capacity for administering public affairs should put aside all hesitation, enter the race for public office, and take a hand in directing the government; for in no other way can a government be administered or greatness of spirit be made manifest."

Gravitas is evident in Cicero's call to service that offers another insight into the Roman character. The Romans took their lives, government, and religion seriously. They valued strength above delicacy, power over agility, mass before beauty, and utility above grace. Even the art of Rome conforms to strict lines of fact and reality – statues, pottery, and mosaics were carved meticulously and crafted as a solemn record of history, rather than a display of imagination or creativity.

## Keeping Up Appearance

Romans wrapped strength in dignity – their loose togas were in no way a testament to a loose lifestyle. They presented themselves as lofty, cognizant of their appearance, whether before gods or man. The toga – about ten square yards of undyed wool – was the formal garb of every Roman. Stripes were added to signify status in society and the government – a broad swath of purple for senators, a narrower one of the same color for members of the equestrian class. Tunics were undergarments – long, wool shirts, which could be bundled for warmth and worn to bed. A woman's *stola* added another long, outer layer, tied by a belt around the waist. Roman women often carried a parasol or fan. Romans who toiled in

the outdoors wore hats, but no one else did. Strap sandals were fashionable footwear, though heavier variations were worn in bad weather or for formal occasions.

Roman life was abundant with pageantry and ceremony. Their rituals bridged the gap between ideal behavior and practical necessity.

Roman celebrations and festivities rigidly followed a calendar that set aside some days as holidays, or *fasti*, during which it was acceptable to host public festivals and religiously sanctioned events, and *nefasti*, on which such festivals were forbidden. "The best of days," according to the poet Catullus, was the Saturnalia in December. In honor of the god Saturn, the festival included a sacrifice in the Temple of Saturn in the Roman Forum and a public banquet, at which slaves had table service from their masters. Gambling, continual parties, the crowning of a mock-king, and a private gift exchange in which tokens such as small dolls or candles were traded, temporarily provided a carnival atmosphere to the usually serious city of Rome.

Romans conducted themselves with high standards of integrity. Few strayed from those standards without justification, though sometimes this required creative interpretation or contrivances.

Before declaring war against an enemy, it was Roman practice to send a college of priests, called *fetiales*, to present its grievances, actual or imaginary, and demand compensation. Mostly posturing – because the demands often were unreasonable – the inevitable refusal of the enemy meant the *fetiales* must march to the boundary of the offending state, call on the gods to pass judgment for Rome, and cast a weapon into enemy territory to symbolize the onset of war. Early on, this ritual presented few problems, as the enemy generally was close at hand. As Rome's territory expanded and borders became more distant, this tactic was no longer feasible. The solution: A representation of any potential enemy country was crafted in an enclosure on the Campus Martius, or Field of Mars, saving the *fetiales* the inconveniences of travel but preserving the ritual, seen as an essential prelude to war.



# 3

## CONQUEST

Like tribal farmers - with their numina to protect their hearth, home, and demarcation of their property – early Romans were not out to conquer the world but simply to strengthen their holdings by warding off encroaching neighbors. Success stretched those property lines and brought close new neighbors who posed new threats. Alliances were forged and enemies subdued first in the nearby Latium plain.

The next five centuries of Roman conquest spanned the Italian peninsula and stretched Rome's borders east and west until the majority of the Mediterranean fell under its control. But this Roman Empire was built piecemeal, and at least early on, without great ambition.

Lands under Roman rule were charged tributes – or taxes – which were exchanged for protection against barbarian invaders, open trade, and a tolerance of local cultures and customs. Despite differences in territories distant from the city, all became Rome – and shared a hope and belief in its destiny. This unity and burgeoning civilization is expressed in a hymn composed by fourth-century poet Prudentius, who wrote: "All whom Rhine and Danube water, or gold-bearing Tagus, or great Ebro, all that Hesperian Tiber flows through or Ganges nourishes or the seven mouths of the warm Nile sustains - all these did God teach to become Romans. A shared law made them peers, intertwined them under a single name, brought the vanquished into the bonds of brotherhood. . . . Areas geographically remote, shores divided by the sea, now merge in allegiance to a single jurisdiction. . . . Such was the achievement of the enormous successes and triumphs of Roman power."

History remembers Rome as invincible – Livy recounts its battles as one-sided and Romans as natural victors. The sting of defeat was seen either as a reminder to Romans that they must remain alert and disciplined or as punishment for offending the gods in some way. Legends built around military conquest helped swell Roman pride and patriotism and highlighted virtues held in high regard by its citizens: bravery, simplicity, and morality.

Among the earliest of these recorded legends, dating to around 500 BCE, details the story of Publius Horatius Cocles, the one-eyed officer of the republic, who, along with two fellow officers, stopped an Etruscan invasion by blocking

passage at a bridge over the Tiber. The Roman army crossed the bridge to safety while Horatius and the other two men stood their ground, then cut down the bridge. In one version of the story, the hero Horatius leapt into the Tiber and "deliberately sacrificed his life, regarding the safety of his country and the glory, which in future would attach to his name as of more importance than his present existence." Livy's account differs – in it, Horatius survived, carried sympathetically by the Tiber to safety, and was heralded in Rome, where a bronze statue was erected as tribute to his heroism.

Another legend promulgated by Livy concerns that of Cincinnatus, a consul in the early Roman republic, who became a model of civic virtue. Born a patrician, modest circumstances were thrust on him when his son was accused of a murder and condemned to death. The youth fled and joined the Etruscans, leaving Cincinnatus to pay a hefty fine. This put the once consul in financial ruin, leaving him with just a small farm. Then Rome called on Cincinnatus for service. A rival tribe, the Aequians, had trapped the Roman army, led by the consul Minucius Esquilinus in the Alban Hills. In a panic, the Senate gave the remaining consul the power to appoint a dictator. He chose Cincinnatus. A delegation sent to call him to the Roman Forum found Cincinnatus plowing a field. His dictatorship was granted for a period of six months, but Cincinnatus required just sixteen days, legend states, to crush the invaders, upon which he gave up power and returned to his plow. The story, Livy wrote, "merits the attention of those who despise all human qualities in comparison with riches and think there is no room for great honors or for worth but amidst a profusion of wealth."

Rome entered the fourth century BCE as the dominant force of central Italy. But its success was not without struggle.

The year 390 BCE brought barbarians to the gates of Rome. A tribe of Gauls, from north of the Alps, sacked the city and demanded a ransom of 1,000 pounds of gold before they would return control to the Romans. It took fifty years for Rome to recover from the attack, and during that time, Romans resolved to protect their borders by vanquishing those at its edges. The conquering Romans moved south to the Greek settlements at the foot of the Italian peninsula.



The Greeks were formidable foes – not necessarily on their own, but because of their alliances. Fearing defeat by the Romans, who were in the area to help one Greek colony combat a local tribe, leaders of the city of Tarentum, in southern Italy, called on the King of Epirus, whose name was Pyrrhus, to fight them off. The Greek king, a conqueror of great repute, surprised the Romans by crossing the sea from Greece to Italy with twenty war elephants, who charged into battle with more than 20,000 men – cavalry, archers, and slingers. Pyrrhus was victorious, but at a cost of 4,000 men. On the Roman side, 7,000 had fallen, but the battle had been waged in Italy, and the Romans could bear the loss. Pyrrhus struck again, winning the battle, but undergoing a similar loss to his army. “Another such victory and I am lost,” he is credited with saying. The term Pyrrhic victory - for battles won at too large a cost – has its roots in this story. Pyrrhus’s success against the Romans won him prestige, and he was approached by two embattled Greek territories, each seeking a ruler to drive out their challengers. He became king of the Greek cities of Sicily and soon found himself preoccupied with their Carthaginian invaders. This diversion gave Rome time to rebuild its army and launch a new attack. Outnumbered and overmatched, Pyrrhus’s army fell, and he was forced to retreat to the Greek mainland, leaving Rome, in effect, master of the entire Italian peninsula.

Now Rome, not Greece, stood in the way of Carthage, enemy of the Sicilians and the Romans’ rivals for superiority in the western Mediterranean. Carthage represented just one of four empires that rivaled Rome – including the Seleucid in Syria, the Ptolemaic in Egypt, and the Macedonian Empire carved out by Alexander the Great. Rome, by now, would accept nothing less than total dominance over the known world, which it spent the next centuries trying to accomplish.

Carthage was a bustling trade hub, originally under control of Phoenicians. Following the withdrawal of Pyrrhus, the Carthaginians became embroiled in a conflict with a group of Italian mercenaries, who called themselves the Mamertines – meaning Sons of Mars. The Mamertines had seized control of the Sicilian city of Messana, and in doing so, threatened Carthage. The Carthaginians marched on Messana; reluctantly, the Romans took up arms with the Mamertines. This was the spark that set off three wars between Rome and Carthage – called the Punic Wars, from the Latin word

*Punicus*, a reference to the people's Phoenician origins.

## The Punic Wars

The First Punic War began in 264 BCE, as a struggle for control of Sicily, and it lasted twenty-three years. Primarily a naval engagement, the Romans were at a disadvantage. Carthage had mastered the sea; Rome had not. While the Romans lacked seafaring experience, they had considerable determination, ingenuity, and luck. Finding a stranded Carthaginian quinquereme, an oar-driven warship, the Romans employed Greek naval architects to duplicate it and assembled a fleet of 100 vessels in two months. Sensing its traditional strategy at sea – ramming and sinking enemy ships – would not be effective against the Carthaginians, the Romans devised an assault bridge, called a *corvus*. It was hinged and included a sharp spike so, when deployed, it attached to an enemy ship, allowing Roman soldiers to board and battle the crew.

Still, not every battle was won.

Claudius Pulcher, who commanded the Roman fleet, sought an omen by observing the eating habits of a flock of sacred chickens he had taken aboard his ship. When the chickens refused food, the captain tossed them into the sea, shouting, "Then drink if you won't eat!" He lost his battle with the Carthaginians, a disaster attributed to his impious behavior, which, upon his return to Rome, earned him a fine.

Roman historian Horace composed a famous ode about Marcus Atilius Regulus, a consul and Roman general, who, after a pair of victories against the Carthaginians in North Africa, was taken prisoner in 255 BCE. A bargain for his life sent him back to the Roman Senate on parole, where he was expected to broker peace. Defiantly, Regulus urged the Senate to refuse the proposals and continue the battle. Though the Romans protested, he stayed true to his word and returned to Carthage, where he was tortured to death in fulfillment of his sentence.

Fourteen years later, a treaty was negotiated with Carthage. It called for Carthage to evacuate Sicily and pay Rome a large war indemnity. Rome returned 8,000 prisoners taken during the war, but Carthage refused to turn over Romans who had

deserted to fight alongside them.

During the twenty-three years that followed the truce between Rome and Carthage, the foes were preoccupied with other conflicts. A dispute over payment put the Carthaginians at odds with mercenaries it had employed during the Roman dispute, and they joined a revolt in Carthage's Libyan settlements. Meanwhile, a quarrel over trading routes across the Adriatic Sea ignited a series of conflicts, called the Illyrian Wars, between Rome and the Ardiaei kingdom.

Carthage regrouped. Stronger than before, it turned its attention back to Rome. A talented general emerged, the son of Hamilcar Barca, a Carthaginian leader during the First Punic War. His name was Hannibal. Determined to strike at the heart of Italy, he led a military expedition across the Alps. His army included thirty-seven war elephants. Their route over the mountain range is disputed; some evidence exists that Hannibal passed within view of the Matterhorn. Livy's account portrays the journey as harrowing and suggests the Carthaginian general employed a lot of ingenuity, such as the use of vinegar and fire to clear a passage blocked by avalanche.

The assault from the north surprised the Romans, who were driven back at the start of the Second Punic War in 281 BCE. This time, the fighting was mostly by land. Over nearly fifteen years, Hannibal outwitted and outmaneuvered the Romans, routing them in one battle after another. When his supply lines were blocked, he negotiated alliances and raided Roman depots as his army marched the length of the Italian peninsula. But, in the end, the best he could do was fight to a stalemate – no single victory, nor the combination of them, was decisive enough to stagger Rome.

Hannibal's invasion brought another outside influence on the religion of Rome. The Romans had learned of Eastern deities such as Cybele through trade, slaves, and conquests abroad, but a cult dedicated to the Asian fertility goddess got its start during the Second Punic War. In consulting the Sibylline Books for guidance in repelling the Carthagian invaders, Roman leaders attempted to enlist Cybele's help in 205 BCE. It seemed to work; Rome began to gain advantage.

In a battle at Metaurus, Hannibal's brother was killed, and his

severed head was carried across Italy and thrown into Hannibal's camp. Next, the Romans led a counterattack on Carthage, and Hannibal was called back to lead the defense of his homeland. In the decisive battle at Zama, near the Carthaginian capital, Romans turned the enemy's war elephants against them. They played trumpets to frighten the animals, who, in a panic, stampeded through the Carthaginian battle lines. Hannibal fell in the battle, and his army surrendered.

One of the allies Hannibal had secured during the Second Punic War was the kingdom of Macedon, in the northeastern part of the Greek peninsula. King Philip V had signed a treaty with Hannibal, in the process making an enemy of Rome. Philip was seventeen when he took his crown. Handsome and charismatic, he was called the "darling of all Greece" and compared to Alexander the Great. Rome saw him as a threat. During his reign, the Macedonians expanded their borders, capturing Egyptian lands in the Aegean Sea. This victory alarmed their Greek neighbors in Pergamum and Rhodes, and they sought Rome's aid to stave off a Macedonian invasion. The Romans declared war in 200 BCE, winning battles in Macedon and Thessaly before achieving a definitive victory at Cynoscephalae in 197 BCE. Philip signed a treaty with Rome, paying an indemnity and surrendering a majority of his fleet.

In Pergamum and Rhodes, the Romans demanded a higher price for their assistance than the Greek states were willing to pay. Rome's oppression and control soon took the place of the Macedonians'. In time, the conflict was renewed with Philip, who feared his hold over his kingdom was at stake. When Philip died, his son Perseus, the last king of Macedon, continued to clash with the Romans. The Battle of Pydna in 168 BCE brought Macedon under Roman control.

In the Seleucid Empire of Syria, another powerful Eastern monarch, Antiochus III, capitalized on the Romans' diverted attention during their conflicts with Philip. He sent forces to the Greek mainland with an eye toward extending his kingdom. He found many Greek states weary of the Romans and quick to form an alliance to oppose them. But the Romans learned of his plans and quashed them in 190 BCE at the Battle of Magnesia. Antiochus retreated to Syria.

The power of Rome was enormous – its intimidation of its

foes so complete that when Antiochus IV maneuvered to attack Alexandria, Rome stopped it without a single blow; it simply ordered him to submit. The son of Rome's former rival sought time to consider but immediately was encircled by Roman forces, who demanded his answer. His choice was made.

More often the Roman army bent its enemies to its will by force rather than words or pressure. Violence was its prime weapon, and Rome directed it ruthlessly at any who dared question the republic's authority. An alliance of Greek city-states, known as the Achaean League, stood up to the Romans and was crushed. Corinth, a member of this confederation, was the last to fall – destroyed in a hail of fire in 146 BCE.

Around the same time, a fifty-year truce between the Romans and Carthaginians had ended. Indemnities paid, Carthage considered the treaty with Rome to be expired – and initiated war with Numidia without consent of the Roman Senate. Such an action was forbidden under the terms of the truce. The Romans considered the move a breach of contract and cause for declaration of war. The Third Punic War was quick and brutal. By 46 BCE, Carthage was destroyed, its survivors sold as slaves. Roman forces leveled the city, then plowed the site and sowed the furrows with salt, turning it into a wasteland.



# 4

## RULE OF ROME

The spoils acquired in the course of its foreign conflicts and conquests showered Rome in new wealth. Of course, it was not evenly distributed. Wealthy Romans became wealthier, while commoners grew poorer. The social and political classes became even more defined and divided.

Politics became dominated by two parties: the optimates, controlled by patricians and plebeians who had acquired some wealth, and the populares, representing the common people. Optimates opposed power given to popular assemblies and the Tribunal of the Plebes, which it believed belonged with the Senate. The more liberal populares were made up largely of patricians, even the rich and powerful, but their decisions relied on popular assemblies and tribunes and acted in their behalf.

The emergence of another social class complicated this political picture. Known as the equestrians, or knights, they could be optimates or populares. Traditionally, order was assigned to high-ranking soldiers who could afford horses, but by the first century, they exerted more influence in the Senate than on the battlefield. All patricians and senators were equestrians. Many were merchants as well. Their status was hereditary but tied to property ownership, and it could be lost if a certain threshold was not met.

While tribunes had made it possible for a plebeian to rise to public office - even the highest office of consul - the government of Rome was largely under the aristocracy. Perhaps the largest obstacle for the poor when it came to participating in politics and policy-making was the fact government positions were unpaid. Only eight of the 108 consuls elected between 200 and 146 BCE, broke this pattern. The typical course of a government career that culminated with a consulship started at the post of quaestor, a petty official. The next rise in rank was aedile. A pair of aediles was assigned to tribunes; another was open to plebeians and patricians. Their mission was to maintain public buildings, regulate festivals, and keep order. An aedile was one step below praetor, a title granted to the commander of an army, a magistrate, or a judge. Praetors were outranked only by the consul, who alone had the power to veto their rulings or orders.

Following a term as praetor or consul, it was common for

politicians to take a post as praetor or a proconsul, retaining powers without the office. These officials were to govern the provinces in the interests of Rome. While their authority in their provinces was nearly unlimited and absolute, in the city, it was overruled by current consuls and praetors. Ambitious governors could, and often did, turn a profit in the provinces. Some were wealthier than others, and the methods by which a consul or praetor won prime appointments were often unsavory. The Senate, which had the power to reward or ruin a politician, made the appointment. Bribery played a role in the selection process – debts incurred from which would be paid many times over if successful.

## Upheaval

The process behind the selection of territorial governors illustrates the corruption rampant in Roman politics. Stirred with an economy of equal parts excess and egress – and a quixotic foreign policy – Rome in the second and first centuries BCE was a powder keg on the verge of explosion. A succession of men, each with a theory on how best to change the established order, were prepared to light the fuse.

First in line were two brothers, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. They believed that with the farmer, so goes Rome. The republic was built on the backs of farmers, who struggled to make a life for themselves, with little available in terms of an advanced career or increased property. At a tribune in 134 BCE, Tiberius sought land grants for commoners to farm and graze cattle, and he opposed the monopolies aristocrats held over these large, rich tracts. This plan did not sit well with the senators, the majority of whom owned the land. Another tribune, under pressure from the Senate, vetoed the proposal, which Tiberius moved to overrule. The Senate deemed his action illegal and was determined to prosecute Tiberius at the end of his term. But he was reelected the next year. During this term, he sought to abolish the rule that gave senators the exclusive right to serve as jurors, opening the duty to the people. Aware of the enemies he had created in the Senate, Tiberius suspected and accused members of trying to poison him when a friend died under suspicious circumstances. The accusations culminated in a riot orchestrated by the Senate, in which Tiberius and more than 300 of his supporters were beaten to death.



Tiberius's causes did not die with him. Ten years after his first term as tribune, his brother Gaius won election to the post. He renewed Tiberius's call for a more equitable distribution of land and fought for the right of people outside the city to be called Roman citizens and share in the benefits of citizenship. He introduced a measure that gave people the right to prosecute any praetor who exiled a citizen without trial and denied any praetor removed by the people the option of seeking office again. The Senate resorted to familiar tactics, employing another tribune first to discredit Gaius, then inciting violence, for which he was blamed. Declared a public enemy, Gaius fled across the Tiber, fighting off men who sought to collect a reward by removing and returning his head to Rome. Finally giving up on the prospect of escape, Gaius had a servant kill him, and then take his own life.

One of the consuls in 121 BCE, Lucius Opimius, ordered the deaths of 3,000 Gaius supporters and pledged to pay the man who brought him Gaius's head its weight in gold. That man, named Septimuleius, did not collect, however. When Gaius's severed head turned out to weigh more than seventeen pounds, it was determined that Septimuleius had committed fraud by removing Gaius's brain and filling the cavity with molten lead.

Opimius was among Roman officials and generals sent to negotiate a peace between quarreling co-rulers in Numidia. When the Numidian king Micipsa died in 118 BCE, he appointed his three sons – including one, Jugurtha, who was adopted – jointly as his successors. Jugurtha had one of his half-brothers killed and declared war on the other, in which he was victorious. The defeated half-brother, Adherbal, fled to Rome to seek allies, but Jugurtha had Roman friends as well. When Adherbal's Roman delegation arrived to set terms, Jugurtha paid bribes to ensure he came out of the negotiations more favorably than his half-brother. The Romans proposed a settlement that divided the kingdom Numidia in halves, with the richer half going to Jugurtha. Opimius was among the Romans found guilty in the bribery scandal.

## **Rise and Fall of Marius**

Six years later, the two kings of Numidia again were at war, and Adherbal once more asked for help from Rome. This

time, Rome sent an army. They trapped Jugurtha but were unable to inflict serious casualties on his forces. Jugurtha negotiated his surrender, and a peace treaty was reached, which was favorable to the Numidian king. Again, bribery was charged. Jugurtha was brought to Rome as a material witness against a general in the Roman army, but rather than testify, he paid another bribe to be excused and left Rome sneering, "At Rome, all things are for sale."

One officer who had marched against Jugurtha in Numidia was Gaius Marius. He won a reputation among the troops, eating with them, and as the fight continued without resolution, suggesting if he were he in control, he could crush Jugurtha with half the men. The soldiers wrote home in praise of Marius, and in the aftermath of the battle and scandal that followed, this "new man" of integrity gained a popularity that propelled him to the consulship in 107 BCE.

An equestrian who supported the populares, he became a people's champion. The assumption of power added to his contempt toward those who would place themselves above him. He was scathing in his rebuke: "They despise me for an upstart, I despise their zoorthlessness. They can taunt me with my social position, I them with their infamies. My own belief is that men are born equal and alike: Nobility is achieved by bravery."

Marius was elected consul six times between 107 and 100 BCE. During those years, Rome enjoyed relative peace within the city. Beyond its walls, however, war raged – fueled by Rome's militaristic leader. He made good on his word, marching again against Jugurtha in Numidia, overcoming his army, capturing him, and trying him in Rome. The African chieftain died in a Roman prison. To the north, Marius thwarted Celtic and Germanic invaders.

The Roman army, under Marius's leadership, changed dramatically. Previously, troops had been drawn only from the ranks of Roman property owners. Marius opened enlistment to all Roman citizens, giving rise to a new soldier, who was furnished with weapons, received a salary, and made a career of military service. These new military professionals owed more to their generals than to the Roman government.

With the swell in recruits, Marius drove out the barbarian incursion and returned to Rome to address domestic issues. A tribune named Lucius Appuleius Saturninus advocated for reforms to lower the price of wheat and grant lands to war veterans. The Senate opposed this move, spurring riots, which it dispatched Marius to quell. The people's champion was caught in a dilemma – politically, he agreed with the radicals; but in the end, his devotion to Rome and the Senate governed his decision. In the interest of public order, he put down the revolt, then went into a period of retirement.

In 95 BCE, the reinvigorated Senate decreed expulsion of all non-citizens from Rome. Four years later, another reformist tribune, Marcus Livius Drusus, called for citizenship to be extended to all freemen of Italy. This proposal aroused the ire of both the populares and optimates and put Drusus in danger. His assassination ignited a brutal two-year Social War, in which many Italian city-states sought to secede from Rome. Marius was called back to Rome to command its army following the deaths of a consul and praetor. He fought reluctantly alongside General Lucius Cornelius Sulla, who had served Marius in Numidia and during his consulship as quaestor. But the two were not friends. Marius resented Sulla for sharing in his acclaim after the capture of Jugurtha. The battle only ended when, begrudgingly, citizenship was extended.

The revived rivalry between Marius and Sulla brought conflict between optimates and populares back to the fore. Sulla had the Senate aligned with him and fought to strengthen its influence over the city. Marius re-established himself as champion of the people. In 88 BCE, Sulla was elected consul. A new threat against Rome, levelled by King Mithradetes of Pontus, required a strong commander – and Marius, now an old man, believed he should lead the Roman army into war. He petitioned the Senate to reverse their appointment of Sulla as commander. Sulla was in Naples, organizing troops for the campaign, when word of Marius's request reached him. Instead of marching on Mithridates, whose invaders had killed 80,000 Italian colonials in a day, Sulla turned back toward Rome. This marked the first instance of Romans marching against Romans within the city. Marius tried to rally slaves, with the promise of freedom, to fight against Sulla's army, but as the fight grew near, the former consul was forced to flee into exile in Africa. Sulla regained control of

Rome.

After restoring order and condemning the followers of Marius within the city to death, Sulla turned his attention back to the invaders in the East. A brutal campaign followed, which historian Athens Plutarch described, writing, "There was no numbering the slain; the amount is to this day conjectured from the space of ground overflowed with blood." The King of Pontus fell, as did cities that backed him.

But Marius had taken advantage of Sulla's absence from Rome, returning from Africa, and seizing control. He was elected consul a seventh time, along with a supporter named Lucius Cornelius Cinna, and exacted bloody revenge on Sulla's allies. But exile and age had taken its toll on Marius, and he died within days. In 83 BCE, Sulla was back in control of Rome and declared all Marius's supporters public enemies. Executions were carried out by the thousands. The screams from the slaughter could be heard in the Senate hall. But Sulla, Plutarch says, "with a calm and unconcerned expression . . . bade the senators pay attention to his speech and not busy themselves with what was going on outside: some naughty people were being admonished at his orders."

The Senate granted Sulla a dictatorship, which he wielded to further empower the Senate, and strip the tribunes of political influence. His allies staffed key positions in government. Provincial governors and generals were forbidden to lead armies or initiate wars outside boundaries set by the Senate. Even in death, his greatest Roman rival, Marius, presented challenges as Sulla clashed with those loyal to his ideals, including Marius's nephew, Gaius Julius Caesar.

Sulla retired following a second consulship in 79 BCE, living out his last year in a country villa.

## **Luxury and Slavery**

New leaders would emerge for the rival social movements, but for some time after the departure of both Marius and Sulla, a calm settled over Rome. Life in the city grew more luxurious. Well-to-do citizens flaunted their wealth, building palatial homes and sparing no expense to furnish and decorate them.

Houses were ringed with elaborate gardens, but exterior adornment was generally an afterthought. The inside mattered most to Romans. Interior decor was dramatic from floor – tiled with mosaic patterns – to ceiling. The finest paintings, often influenced by Greek mythology, lined the walls and sculptures stood throughout. Ivory and gold accents elevated otherwise simple, sparse furnishings, from chairs to chests and candelabras.

Guests were usually entertained in an atrium, a large reception area with an open ceiling and a pool to collect rainwater. A study or small dining area, called the tablinum, opened onto the peristylum, an enclosed court landscaped with columns, fountains, and statues.

Dinner parties were held in the triclinium, or formal dining room, commonly furnished with three couches that could seat up to nine. These parties were known to begin in the afternoon and continue late into the evening. Meals consisted of three courses – gustus, or starters of salad, shellfish, eggs, and honey wine; cena, or the main course, which could feature lobster and exotic meats; and a “second table” of rich desserts. Any food left over was distributed among the host and guests and often served as the next day’s lunch, or prandium. Poorer Romans dined less lavishly, primarily eating bread, olives, and grapes. They preferred fruit to meat, which, when they had it, consisted of mutton or pork.

At the back of a wealthy household, slaves toiled in the kitchens and work rooms and slept in meager accommodations. Even a middle-class merchant in Rome had a small number of slaves; patrician families might own hundreds.

Prisoners taken in wars and conquests fueled a robust slave trade. They led miserable lives – some more miserable than others. Slaves put to hard labor, in construction and the mines, were worked to the brink of collapse, nearly starved, and left to die when too sick or old to be useful.

Some Roman masters could be sympathetic, granting freedom to slaves after a period of servitude, even forging friendships with them. Some accepted a royalty from slaves in exchange for allowing them to carry on their own businesses. With their owners’ permission, slaves were

allowed marry each other. Some saved their meager wages to buy freedom. Once free, it was not unusual for a former slave to own slaves.

The slave population in Rome eventually outnumbered the citizens who owned them, leaving the city in constant fear of an uprising.

Many slaves were sold into Roman arenas as gladiators, forced to fight each other and various beasts to death. One such slave, Spartacus, planned a revolt in 73 BCE that raged for three years. The gladiator became commander of a slave army that grew to 70,000. A wealthy Roman general named Marcus Lucinius Crassus was dispatched along with 40,000 soldiers by the Senate to quash the rebellion. They divided and conquered Spartacus's men, and in a grisly warning against future outbreaks, lined the Appian Way from Capua to Rome with the crucified bodies of 6,000 slaves. A law – mandating a death sentence for every slave in a household in the event just one acted violently against his or her master – was another deterrent. No other revolt matched the tenaciousness of the one led by Spartacus.

## Political Upheaval

Gnaeus Pompeius, called Pompey the Great, a general who had risen to popularity as one of Sulla's most trusted lieutenants, was lifted to consul in 70 BCE, despite his young age of thirty-five and lack of political experience. He grew more popular because of his actions to restore power to tribunes and rescind many oppressive orders decreed by Sulla. He served one term as consul. Two years later, he was called back in service and appointed commander of a naval campaign to clear pirates out of the Mediterranean. Given the post for three years, he needed only three months to declare victory. Next, he seized on a foe he first encountered when he had served as Sulla's lieutenant, Mithridates of Pontus, a threat again to Roman provinces. This time, the invaders were defeated decisively, and the king took his own life.

In Pompey's absence, the city was overcome by chaos, mostly due to an unscrupulous man named Catiline, who, thwarted twice before in campaigns for consul, ran again in the elections of 63 BCE. Catiline lost to Marcus Tullius Cicero, who had defeated him the year before for consul and

threatened a violent overthrow of the government in response.

Cicero – among Rome's most famous orators and writers – condemned Catiline for his tactics of intimidation in speeches before the Senate. Four of those speeches are among the roughly sixty preserved for history. In the first, he opened with, "How long, O Catiline, will you abuse our patience? And for how long will that madness of yours mock us? To what end will your unbridled audacity hurl itself?"

His insurrection was a failure, and Catiline was slain, but his popularity with the people serves as yet another window into the growing discontent with the existing state of affairs in Rome.



# 5

## CAESAR, RISE OF THE EMPIRE



Word of Pompey's military prowess reached Rome before he did, and as his army approached the city, many expected he would retake control of the government. But Pompey honored tradition. Dismissing his soldiers outside Rome, he promised them public lands to farm. The Senate remained suspicious. Pompey's efforts to weaken their power during his term as consul earned him enemies among the senators. He was granted a triumph, the equivalent of an official welcome – his third. His procession into the city was grander than any before. The spoils of his conquests were paraded through the streets of Rome. Pompey rode the triumphal chariot. A pearl-studded portrait of the general was carried behind him. Two days of festivities included games in his honor and concluded with a public feast.

But the Senate dishonored Pompey, refusing to keep his promise to soldiers of land grants and rejecting the political arrangements he had made in Rome's conquered Eastern provinces.

Another ambitious Roman stepped to the forefront at this time: Gaius Julius Caesar, a champion of the people who matched Cicero in his ability to motivate and influence with masterfully crafted prose. Caesar and Cicero were lifelong political rivals, but each admired the other's literary style. "You have gained a triumph to be preferred to that of the greatest generals," Caesar said to Cicero, "for it is a nobler thing to enlarge the boundaries of human intelligence than those of the Roman Empire."

Caesar employed that influence to coax Pompey and his former co-consul, Marcus Licinius Crassus, into a secret alliance against their enemies in the Senate. Despite their once shared rule of Rome, Crassus and Pompey were not friends and distrusted each other. Both were ready to stand against the Senate. Crassus felt slighted that his friends had been denied reimbursements for tax-collection contracts that had not paid off as expected. Caesar turned their common enemy to his favor, convincing Pompey and Crassus that together, they could bend the government to their will and mutual benefit. The First Triumvirate was formed, though its members kept their alliance secret. Caesar and Crassus already had been partners; Crassus had helped finance Caesar's political campaigns. But Pompey required more prompting. Caesar offered his daughter, Julia, to Pompey in

marriage, to cement the alliance.

With Caesar elected consul for 59 BCE, he was in a position to help his partners. Pompey's veterans were granted the land they had been promised; Crassus's friends were repaid for their failed investments. Caesar exerted power over his co-consul, Bibullus, selected by Caesar's enemies in the Senate to weaken his rule. The Triumvirate was revealed at an opportune moment. Having proposed a redistribution of public lands to benefit the poor in Rome, Caesar forced it on the Senate, pledging along with Pompey and Crassus to see it passed – by force if necessary. Caesar held sway over the Senate for the remainder of his consulship, at the end of which, he wielded the power of his Triumvirate to secure provincial appointment of his choice as proconsul in Gaul. Caesar also compelled the Senate to extend his appointment to Gaul from one year to five.

The Triumvirate was often in danger of collapsing, but in 56 BCE, it was renewed. Pompey was being pulled away from the alliance. His loyalty to his former commander, Sulla, and the optimates at last won out following the death of his wife, Julia, in 54 BCE, removing the link that bound him to Caesar. Crassus's death in battle in 53 BCE marked the end of the Triumvirate. While Caesar conquered Gaul, making a name for himself as a military hero, Pompey grew more powerful in Rome and established himself as leader of a movement to oppose Caesar.

After a nine-year absence from Rome, Caesar was ready to make his triumphant return. His political stature had increased immensely – his victories north of the Alps had expanded Rome's borders and established him as a leader. Despite an order from the Senate to disband his army, he turned it toward the city. Sensing war was at hand, the Senate and Pompey agreed: If Caesar marched on Rome, Pompey would lead the Roman army against him.

The point of no return was the river Rubicon, a natural boundary marking the end of Caesar's territory in Gaul. Crossing it with his army without the Senate's sanction, was a violation of the law and treason. Caesar steeled his men and began his march on Rome.

Now, less confident in his chances to ward off his former ally,

Pompey abandoned Rome. Many supporters – among them soldiers and senators – fled with him to Greece. Caesar, meanwhile, took control of Rome, leaving his second in command, Mark Antony in charge as he pursued Pompey. In a twenty-eight-day campaign, he defeated Pompey's forces in Spain and Greece. At Pharsalus in 48 BCE, the commanders met in a decisive battle. Caesar was victorious but failed to kill or capture Pompey, who escaped to Egypt, where he hoped to find refuge. He found treachery. The Egyptian king, Ptolemy, saw an opportunity to ingratiate himself with Caesar, and by extension Rome, by having Pompey killed. Pompey was beckoned to the shore with the promise of an audience with the pharaoh, but as his boat landed and he stepped ashore, he was stabbed to death. His head was removed and set aside as a gift for Caesar, who arrived three days later.

No friendship was won between Ptolemy and Caesar, however. Caesar, presented with the head of his foe, was not grateful. He was angry, even mournful, and ordered a proper Roman cremation for Pompey's body.

Caesar and his officers occupied a palace at Alexandria, where a secret meeting was arranged with the young Queen Cleopatra – Ptolemy's sister, wife, and co-ruler, who wanted the rule of Egypt to herself. Caesar was smitten, and the two began a love affair, as well as an alliance to overthrow Ptolemy. The boy-king was killed in the fight that ensued, and Cleopatra assumed the throne.

For the eighteen months Caesar had been away from Rome, Mark Antony had ruled ineffectually, and the city was in turmoil. Caesar had himself elected consul for 46 BCE and began the difficult task of restoring order. He quelled riots and filled empty seats in the Senate, even forgiving and reinstating many who had opposed him. The next year, he led a military campaign to Africa against an alliance of some scattered enemies from previous conflicts. This victory gave him authority over Rome. For forty days, his triumphs were celebrated with processions and festivals the likes of which never before had been seen in Rome. The Senate declared Caesar dictator for ten years.

For the most part, Caesar used his power well. His legislative agenda was largely aimed at improving life for common

people. He relieved debilitating debts for many, extended voting rights, and exposed corruption. He improved Rome's physical infrastructure, upgrading roads, building aqueducts, dredging harbors, and adding libraries and public architecture to the landscape. His Julian calendar – the immediate forerunner of today's calendar – corrected significant problems with the ordering of months and seasons.

The gains he made for the populace, however, won him more enemies among Rome's powerful aristocracy. Caesar was open about his distaste toward rich patricians, though he was one himself. He passed laws that targeted their pretentiousness, setting limits on displays of luxury, such as the wearing of pearls.

Meanwhile, rumors circulated that Caesar was not satisfied with the title of dictator and meant to make himself king. Caesar's actions perpetuated these rumors. Among other signs of his growing arrogance, he had statues of himself placed among those of other kings. A conspiracy formed among his enemies in the Senate and aristocracy, who coaxed participation from a trusted friend, Marcus Junius Brutus. As Caesar entered the Senate on March 15, 44 BCE – the Ides of March – the conspirators converged on him, stabbing him to death.

## **Assassination's Aftermath**

Mark Antony, Caesar's most trusted advisor, moved to reclaim control of Rome. But another man, Octavian, Caesar's grandnephew, had a more legitimate claim. He was named in Caesar's will as his principal heir, with which came fortune and prestige. Cicero also presented opposition, seeking to restore the pre-Caesar senatorial aristocracy.

The struggle for power hurled Rome into a five-year civil war.

Antony first served as consul alone, but the Senate aligned against him, supporting Octavian, who it saw as more tractable. But Caesar's nephew soon displayed boldness worthy of his heritage. He seized the consulship for himself, had the Senate rescind its decree naming Antony a public enemy, and with him formed an alliance. With the addition of a third ally – a top lieutenant to Caesar named Lepidus – the Second Triumvirate was formed. The trio divided rule of the

empire. Antony commanded the East, Octavian the West, and Lepidus the Roman provinces of Africa.

First, they set out to avenge the death of Caesar. The conspirators were hunted down. Cicero, among the thousands ordered executed, managed to find refuge in the countryside for a short time. But doggedly hunted, he decided to leave Italy on a ship destined for Macedonia. He was discovered before he could depart by a centurion and tribune. Resigned to his fate, he bared his neck and throat to the soldiers, awaiting the blow of the sword that sent his head rolling in the sand.

The Second Triumvirate ruled Rome for two five-year terms, but ultimately it grew unstable, unable to withstand the individual ambitions of its members and the jealousy that developed between them. In 36 BCE, Octavian saw an opportunity to claim a larger piece of the empire. He came into conflict with Lepidus over the dominion of Sicily, forcing his Triumvirate partner into exile and taking over the African provinces. Meanwhile, Anthony, who was married to Octavian's sister, was in Egypt, where like Caesar, he was beguiled by Cleopatra. Antony severed his marriage, took the Egyptian queen as his wife, and put himself and Octavian into open conflict, an act that marked the dissolution of the Triumvirate.

Octavian took steps to discredit and disgrace Antony. In 32 BCE, he produced a document he claimed was Antony's will, which named Cleopatra as his heir and designated Alexandria as the site for a tomb for him and his queen. Read before the Senate, it accomplished Octavian's goal: The Senate passed a motion to revoke Antony's consulship and declared war on Cleopatra. The following year, a Roman fleet pursued Antony and Cleopatra, winning the Battle at Actium and driving the pair back to Alexandria, where, in despair, they committed suicide.

## **Empire**

Now, Octavian stood alone. A Rome divided for almost a century was his to command, but with the crumbling of the Triumvirate, so fell the republic, although Octavian insisted he had restored it. In 27 BCE, he declared as much to the Senate, before offering his resignation. In truth, Octavian was

posturing, and his ambitions were as inflated as ever. Complete authority over Rome had to be carefully won by courting the Senate and people in such a way as to not arouse suspicions that Octavian sought to establish a monarchy. It worked. The Senate refused his resignation, instead bestowing upon him the title of princeps, or first citizen. Octavian chose the name Augustus, meaning exalted. Caesar would be added to his name – a term which came to mean emperor, though Julius Caesar never actually held the position. Augustus was careful not to call himself emperor – for the same reasons he had avoided association with the title king, or rex. But with his ascension complete, the Roman Empire was born.

The republic had broken down. The vast dominion of Rome was in tatters - its government toothless and corrupted, its armies undisciplined, and its provinces mismanaged. The work of rebuilding it into a power worthy of Rome required a strong hand – an emperor – and that was Augustus. He knew it, but he was smart enough to realize Romans would cling to time-honored traditions of the republic. So he established a delicate balance - maintaining the façade and form of old institutions while quietly making major decisions himself. In this way, the bricks of the new empire were laid under the premise of restoring the old.

The Senate was complicit in this ploy. To all appearances, at least at first, Augustus's regime was constitutional and conventional. Officially, he held the traditional titles of consul, then proconsul, and finally, senators bestowed on him the position of tribune. These powers combined at once to put him in a position to advance his agenda and rebuff efforts to stand in his way – not only in the city, but also in key provinces, where he sent senators under his command to carry out his orders. The Senate, in particular, was easily swayed: He held veto power over it.

But the titles themselves were primarily for show. The only one that mattered was princeps, the basis of rule for three centuries of emperors starting with Augustus.

The burgeoning empire presented problems that the old structure and systems of the republic could not address. Julius Caesar sought to strengthen its foundation by expanding public service, opening political positions to

supporters in the middle class and prominent people from the provinces, but the Senate had resisted. Augustus established a sort of civil service – a so-called imperial household, where the day-to-day work of government was accomplished. These appointments were open to any Roman citizen – and, in fact, more likely were to be filled by the poor and common people, even slaves.

Titles were deceiving. Terming them household posts effectively excluded Roman aristocrats, who thought such positions were beneath them. The inclusion of other positions – such as cook and butler – in the imperial household also gave it the personal service connotation that well-to-do Romans could not abide. But responsibilities of the posts were considerable. The secretary of accounts and finance managed the imperial treasury. Secretaries for correspondence and petitions were, in effect, secretaries of state.

The emperor kept a close accounting of the affairs of the empire, which historian Suetonius summarizes as “the conditions of the whole empire; how many soldiers there were in active service . . . how much money there was in the public treasury . . . and what revenues were in arrears. [Augustus] added, besides, the names of the freedmen and slaves from whom the details could be demanded.”

The lives of common people improved dramatically through appointments to the imperial household. Even a slave could be looked after by a staff of more than a dozen. A funerary inscription details such a staff for a slave named Musicus, who had in his service a businessman, a purchasing agent, three secretaries, a doctor, a man and woman in charge of silver, a valet, two chamberlains, two footmen, two cooks, and one girl named Secunda, whose duties go unrecorded.

Augustus’s reliance on his imperial household for the day-to-day business of Rome allowed him time and energy to devote to long-term improvements. The emperor had carved on a pair of bronze pillars a kind of epitaph, called the *res gestae*, which translates to deeds done. Placed at his mausoleum, it boasted of various buildings, temples, and shrines he had constructed and of his achievements in establishing law and order, and strengthening morality. Suetonius says Augustus claimed to have found Rome brick and left it marble. The inscription states that Augustus spent 600 million silver

denarii of his own on public projects; the annual expenses of Rome are estimated at about half of that amount.

A brief but serious illness struck Rome's first emperor in 23 BCE, which caused widespread speculation about who would succeed him. There was no constitutional formula. Some think Augustus intended his second in command, Marcus Agrippa, to take over. Agrippa was married to Augustus's daughter, and they had three sons and two daughters. When Agrippa died in 12 BCE, Augustus adopted two of his sons, Gaius and Lucius, as his own and helped to direct their political career. At the same time, Augustus had his stepson, Tiberius Claudius, marry the emperor's widowed daughter. Gaius and Lucius died prematurely, in CE 2 and CE 4 respectively. Tiberius was the next in line, and Augustus empowered him in advance in such a way that would guarantee his acceptance as the next princeps.





# 6

## REIGN OF TERROR

Augustus adopted Tiberius as his son, bestowing on him the powers of tribune. Two years before he died at the age of seventy-five, Augustus made Tiberius his equal, as co-princeps.

But in CE 14, with Augustus dead, it became clear that Tiberius was not a leader of Augustus's stature. Tiberius attempted to emulate his predecessor, but despite careful preparation for the role of princeps, he didn't want it. He cited his own advanced age – he was nearly fifty-five – in asking for rule over just a portion of the empire. He sought to empower the Senate to act without his direct orders, but senators had become accustomed to a strong ruler. Tiberius derided them as "men fit to be slaves."

The new emperor relented, but his bitterness fueled a brutality and depravity that dissipated much of the goodwill and respect Augustus had cultivated. Tiberius was, in contrast to Augustus, unpopular both with common people and the aristocratic Senate. Plots were hatched to overthrow him, and Tiberius was sensitive to even the suggestion of treachery. He was ruthless in his suspicions. "Not a day passed without an execution," Suetonius wrote, "not even days that were sacred and holy, for he put some to death even on New Year's day. Many were accused and condemned with their children and even by their children. The relatives of victims were forbidden to mourn for them. . . . The word of no informer was doubted."

Still, the twenty-three-year reign of Tiberius had some accomplishments, described by one writer, Velleius Paterculus, as one in which "strife has been banished from the Forum, canvassing for office from the Campus Martius, discord from the Senate house . . . the magistrates have regained their authority . . . the courts their dignity . . . and all have either been imbued with the wish to do right or have been forced to do so."

The last eleven years of Tiberius's rule over Rome was from afar. In CE 26, tired of political fighting within the city, he left for the island of Capri. In his absence, rumors of debauchery and cruelty reached Rome, which he had left in the hands of an unscrupulous lieutenant named Sejanus.

Sejanus commanded a Praetorian Guard of between 6,000

and 9,000 men within the city, but soon it was not enough. He plotted to become emperor, was captured and executed before he could act. With this, Tiberius's reputation was damaged beyond repair. When word of his death in CE 37, at the age of seventy-seven, reached Rome, "the people were so glad . . . some ran about shouting 'Tiberius to the Tiber' while others prayed to Mother Earth . . . to allow the dead man no abode except among the damned."

## **Caligula, Claudius, and Nero**

In his will, Tiberius divided rule of the empire between his grandson, Gemellus, and his grandnephew, Gaius, widely known by his nickname Caligula – meaning little soldier's boot – which he received from soldiers who served under his father, General Germanicus. But Caligula had the will nullified, arguing Tiberius's insanity, and assumed the limitless powers of princes alone.

Because of his father's reputation in the military, as well as because he was not Tiberius, Caligula was hailed at first as a popular hero, greeted by the crowds of Romans with shouts of "our baby," and "our star." His early actions were seen as generous. Declaring the treason trials of Tiberius a thing of the past, he recalled many who had been sent into exile. Citizens suspected of deviant behavior were banished from the city. He granted bonuses to soldiers and veterans. He pushed tax relief and staged lavish public spectacles, such as gladiator battles.

Before the close of his first year as emperor, however, Caligula became seriously ill. The cause may have been poison. He recovered, but he was a changed man. He began to act in a cruel manner and did not hesitate to abuse his power. He ordered the execution of his cousin, Gemellus, once his challenger for the rule of Rome. He terrorized all he encountered, especially those closest to him. His distraught grandmother committed suicide – though some speculate Caligula poisoned her. He executed his father-in-law and brother-in-law, made his uncle Claudius a figure of ridicule, and sent two of his sisters into exile. His third and favorite sister, Julia Drusilla, died of a fever. Even his own household troops, the Praetorian Guard, were subject to Caligula's ferocity.

Prior to Caligula, Romans had been known to deify their emperors in death, as a form of memorial. But Caligula demanded to be worshipped as a living god. He appeared in public dressed as various gods and demigods, and he had the heads of gods removed from statues in Roman temples, to be replaced with his own. In public documents, he is sometimes referred to as the god Jupiter.

One god to which Caligula subscribed was the fertility goddess Isis. Originally Egyptian, but later Hellenized, she was the wife of Osiris, the god most associated with the afterlife and the underworld. Believers held that Osiris was murdered by his brother Typhon and torn to pieces, which were scattered throughout Egypt. Isis is said to have gathered her husband's remains and bandaged him for a proper burial, which impressed the gods so much Osiris was resurrected as the god of the afterlife. This story is the basis of Isis's tie to resurrection and rebirth. Her followers felt reborn and immortal. Caligula initiated a procession in Isis's honor and was known to participate in her mysteries dressed in female garb.

In CE 40, Caligula's divinity delusion reached its peak. He informed the Senate he was prepared to leave Rome for Egypt, where he would be worshipped as a god. This announcement was too much for the Senate to bear, and with the aggrieved Praetorian Guard, an assassination plot began to take shape.

The next year, as Caligula was addressing a troupe of young actors during a series of spectacles honoring the Divine Augustus, conspirators attacked and stabbed him to death. Seutonius compares the assassination to Caesar's. Thirty stab wounds were inflicted - the same as Caesar, according to Seutonius. Because Caesar was not emperor, Caligula is remembered as the first Roman emperor to be assassinated. He was buried hastily. Caligula's wife also was stabbed to death, and their young daughter was killed - bludgeoned against a wall. His uncle, Claudius, narrowly escaped the same fate; he was discovered by members of the Praetorian Guard, cowering behind a curtain in the palace, and spirited away to their camp.

Only thirty years old at his death, Caligula had yet to make any arrangements for a successor, leaving Rome with a void

in leadership. The Senate saw an opportunity to restore power by appointing a ruler of its own choosing. But the senators did not act quickly enough. Claudius, fifty years old, won the support of the Praetorian Guard, and with it, took the title of emperor. He ordered the guard to execute Caligula's assassins.

Sickness in his youth left Claudius with a limp and slightly deaf, which caused many – even in his family – to dismiss him as a nonthreatening fool. Despite a lack of political experience and his appearance, Claudius ruled sensibly and steadily. This surprised many and caused some to question whether his reputation was a disguise and a survival tactic.

Born in Gaul, Claudius was the first emperor with roots outside Rome. His reign constituted the greatest expansion of the empire since Augustus - conquering Thrace, Noricum, Pamphylia, Lycia, and Judea. His most ambitious conquest was Britain, which had sheltered Gallic rebels. A census ordered by Claudius in CE 48 showed a gain of about a million to the population of the empire since Augustus's reign.

Under Claudius, the empire grew restless. In the provinces, industrial centers to rival Rome were emerging, and the governors of these cities demanded a larger stake in the empire and its government. Claudius relaxed the standards for citizenship, granting it to prominent people in the provinces, and permitted chieftains from Gaul to serve in the Senate. Rome gained a reputation outside its borders as a place even someone of lowest stature could improve his life. A satire, written by Petronius, wove a tale about an Asian king who had himself sold into slavery in Rome for a chance at advancement in the world.

The Latin Right spread rapidly, first to the western Alps, then to Rome's Spanish provinces. Just short of full Roman citizenship, the Latin Right extended freedoms and granted prestige to top provincial officials. People were permitted to own land or lawfully marry in any Latin city and become a citizen of that city simply by moving there. To possess the Latin Right meant protection under Roman law.

In CE 54 A.D., Claudius was poisoned by his fourth wife, Agrippina, in a move meant to secure succession for her son, Nero, from a previous marriage. There is speculation the

couple had become combative, and Claudius had flaunted plans of naming his son, Britannicus, as heir. She had arranged prior to the murder for Claudius to adopt Nero. The poison was slipped into a plate of mushrooms, which Romans considered the food of the gods.

Nero was sixteen when he ascended as emperor. Almost immediately, he called for Claudius to be deified. Within the year, he eliminated his step-brother Britannicus, who challenged Nero's right to rule, with poison. Then he tried to kill his mother. Attempts on her life failed. She had the foresight to build an immunity to the poison that killed Britannicus, so it was ineffective when Nero tried to dose her with it. He then had the ceiling over his mother's bed rigged to collapse, but Agrippina survived. She managed to swim safely to shore when a boat Nero sent her out on fell apart by design. Finally, he ordered her assassination and framed it as a suicide.

For six days in CE 64, Rome was engulfed in flames. The Great Fire started in shops at the southeastern end of the Circus Maximus, and by the time it was extinguished, three of Rome's fourteen districts were in ruins and another seven were extensively damaged. Nero, who boasted of rebuilding the city to his glory, was believed to have orchestrated the destruction. "Whether [the fire was] the result of accident or of the emperor's guile is uncertain," wrote Tacitus, "as authors have given both versions. . . . It started first in that part of the Circus which adjoins the Palatine . . . where, amid the shops containing inflammable wares, the conflagration broke out, instantly gathered strength, and, driven by the wind, swept down the length of the Circus. . . . The blaze in its fury ran first through the lower portions of the city, rose to the hills, then again devastated the lower portions."

As the flames licked at his palace, the emperor rushed back to Rome from Antium. In a display of generosity, he spent his own money to organize a relief effort, throwing "open the Campus Martius, the public structures . . . and even his own gardens, and put up temporary structures to receive the destitute multitude," according to Tacitus. "The necessities of life were brought up from Ostia and neighboring towns, and the price of grain was reduced. . . . These acts, though popular, were of no effect, because a rumor had spread about that, at the very time when the city was in flames, the

emperor had mounted his private stage and sung of the destruction of Troy, comparing present misfortunes with the calamities of the past."

Legend has Nero in stage costume, playing a lyre and singing the epic *Sack of Troy* as the fire raged. He became known as the emperor who fiddled while Rome burned – though no fiddles existed in Rome at that time. The lyre is associated with Nero, who craved attention and believed himself to be a talented artist. He wrote songs performed by others throughout the empire and performed mostly in private, until CE 64, when he started playing in public in an attempt at gaining popularity. It is possible he was encouraged by those in his inner circle, even the Senate. To some, the sight of a nobleman – an emperor, no less - on stage was shameful. Nero paid no attention. He compelled all to attend. "While he was singing," Suetonius wrote, "no one was allowed to leave the theater even for the most urgent reasons. And so it is said that some women gave birth to children there, while . . . [others in the audience] feigned death and were carried out as if for burial."

Nero was self-obsessed and lived and ruled in excess. He yearned to be universally adored. Heeding cries from the poor, he sought to repeal taxes entirely. When warned that doing so would bankrupt the treasury, he settled for a drastic tax cut. Meanwhile, he poured public money into grand gymnasiums and theatres and staged elaborate spectacles. The cost to rebuild Rome after The Great Fire was an immense drain on the city's finances. For the first time in the history of the empire, Roman currency was devalued.

A plot brewing in the Senate to overthrow Nero in CE 65 was rooted out and stopped. Averse to battle, the emperor struggled with outbreaks in Armenia, Britain, and Judea. In CE 68, his army rebelled, with generals in the provinces of Gaul, Africa, and Spain attempting to seize power. Support for the opposition against Nero was mounting. The emperor finally fled Rome, intending to assemble a fleet to carry him to a province in the east that remained loyal to him. But, Suetonius writes, he abandoned that plan when some officers refused to obey his command. Without friends or subordinates, Nero slipped away in disguise to a villa four miles outside of the city. Word reached him by courier that the Senate had declared him a public enemy. In truth,

senators were undecided on the emperor's fate, and sent horsemen to bring him back to Rome to discuss a compromise that would keep him alive. At the sound of the horses approaching, Nero fell into despair, and unable to take his own life, ordered a servant to kill him. His last words were, "What an artist the world is losing!"

## The Four Emperors

Rome was again in upheaval. Nero's death marked the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty of emperors, which began with Augustus and lasted nearly 100 years. The next year was marked by instability and civil war. It became known as the Year of the Four Emperors.

As Tacitus noted: "The secret of empire was out: Emperors could be made elsewhere than in Rome." A prefect of the Praetorian Guard named Nymphidius Sabinus, who had convinced the guard to conspire against Nero, staked a claim to the role of emperor. But fellow soldiers turned on him and killed him in favor of another commander.

Born in the Italian province of Terracina, Galba had earned a reputation as a capable, strict, decisive military strategist in the provinces. He was met at the gates of Rome by members of the Praetorian Guard, who offered their support contingent upon a set of demands. He responded by killing many of them. Determined to rebuild the treasury depleted by Nero's excess, Galba levied massive taxes and refused to pay bribes to the Praetorian Guard for their loyalty – a fatal measure.

Seven months into his reign, Galba made arrangements for a successor, which was interpreted as a sign of fear. His choice of a nobleman named Lucius Calpurnius Piso rankled one of his earliest supporters, Marcus Salvius Otho, who expected he would be next in line. Otho rallied the Praetorian Guard to kill Galba, then install him as emperor. Galba's head was taken as a trophy, paraded and mocked by the soldiers. Otho had his challenger, Piso, killed soon after.

A rebellion that had been organized against Galba by two legions on the Rhine sought to install their general Vitellius as emperor. Marching on Rome, they were surprised to find Otho in power, but nonetheless remained determined. Otho was ill-prepared for the battle that ensued, and his troops were



defeated. His three months as emperor ended with his suicide.

The Senate accepted Vitellius as emperor. He ruled for eight months, during which Rome was racked by violent riots. Lazy and self-indulgent, Vitellius was fond of extravagant feasts and banquets – as many as four a day – and staged regular gladiatorial spectacles. In response to a prophecy that his rule would be long if he outlived his mother, he had her starved to death.

In much the same way as he gained control, Vitellius lost it. Armies in the eastern provinces on the Danube proclaimed their general, Vespasian, as a rival emperor.

According to one account, Vespasian, leading his men to quell a rebellion in Judea, “one day . . . emerged from his bedchamber, a few soldiers standing by in the usual formation . . . saluted him as emperor; then others ran up, calling him Caesar and Augustus and heaping on him all the titles of the principate. [Soon] all Syria had sworn the same allegiance. . . . All the provinces washed by the sea as far as Asia . . . and all the territory extending inland to Pontus and Armenia, took the oath.”

The commander’s advance on Rome left a path of destruction in its wake. In northern Italy, Vespasian’s army clashed with Vitellius’s troops in the city of Cremona. “Forty thousand armed men now burst into the city,” according to Tacitus, “together with sutlers and camp followers. . . . Ravishing was mixed up with slaughter, and slaughter followed upon outrage. Old men and women, well stricken in years and of no value for plunder, were maltreated by way of sport. Grownup maidens and comely youths that came in the way were violently torn to pieces by the ravishers, who ended by falling in murderous conflict with each other. Men carrying off for themselves money or offerings of solid gold from the temples, were hewn down by others stronger than themselves. . . . In an army so varied in character and tongue . . . every man had his own cupidity . . . nothing was unlawful.”

As the soldiers turned toward Rome, Vespasian marched on and seized Egypt, which supplied most of Rome’s grain. Learning of this, Vitellius was prepared to resign, but his

retreat was blocked by the Praetorians, who compelled him to remain in the palace. Vespasian's troops found him hiding there, executed him, and threw his body into the Tiber.

## **Pax Romana**

With his rival dead, Vespasian sent Rome the grain it was desperate for, along with an edict that he would reverse many policies of Nero, particularly those regarding treason. In a temple in Egypt, he had a vision and was approached by two men who were convinced he had the divine power to work miracles. He was in Alexandria in CE 69 when the Senate officially confirmed his authority. While one of his generals carried out his will in Rome, rumors that Vespasian was a divine healer reached the city.

The next year, Vespasian arrived in Rome and worked to build a constitutional base for his reign. He restored power to the Senate, ending a military grip on the Roman government that had persisted since Nero's death.

The Senate gratefully issued a decree "that he shall have the right . . . to conclude treaties with whomever he wishes . . . to convene the Senate . . . to extend and advance the boundaries . . . to transact and do whatever he deems to serve the interests of the state and the dignity of all things divine, human, public and private."

The reign of peace that followed was a welcome change from what Tacitus called the "period rich in disasters" which had preceded it. Vespasian's efforts to reconcile with the Senate helped maintain that peace – called pax Romana.

Like Claudius, Vespasian extended Roman citizenship, granting the Latin Right to provinces in Spain and making citizens of any provincial soldiers. Wise and disciplined, he stabilized the growing empire by strengthening the government of its provinces and command of its armies, and building new roads and forts. These improvements carried his legacy to the far reaches of Rome's territories. A milestone marker along a road near Smyrna, in Asia Minor, reads: "The Emperor Caesar Vespasian Augustus, pontifex maximus, holding the tribunician power for the sixth year, acclaimed imperator thirteen times, father of his country, consul six times, designated consul for a seventh time, censor, saw to

the repair of the roads.”

The Roman treasury, plunged into bankruptcy, had yet to recover, which presented a challenge that the emperor met judiciously. Expense cuts and new taxes were carefully enacted. His economic policy favored the struggling working class. Seutonius offers an example: “To a mechanical engineer who promised to transport some heavy columns to the Capitol at small expense, he gave no mean reward for his invention, but refused to make use of it, saying that he should not be forced to take from the poor . . . the work that fed them.”

Vespasian’s ten-year reign signaled the start of the peaceful Flavian dynasty – his family name was Flavius – continued by his two sons over the next twenty-seven years. Relieved of the oppression of the rulers who came before – and the infighting over whose right to rule was more valid – Romans again had the luxury of putting the proliferation of the empire above that of its emperor.

This new hope was evident in a speech given by a Roman general named Petilius Cerialis in CE 70 to former Gallian rebels: “From praiseworthy emperors you derive equal advantage though you dwell far away, while the cruel ones are most formidable to those near them. Endure the extravagance and rapacity of your masters just as you bear barren seasons and excessive rains and other natural disasters. . . . The good fortune and order of eight centuries has consolidated this mighty fabric of empire, and it cannot be pulled asunder without destroying those who sunder it.”

Seventy years old and struck with a sudden illness, Vespasian died in CE 79, demanding help to stand – because, as he said, “an emperor should die on his feet.” His last words were delivered with wit: “Oh! I think I’m becoming a god!”

His son Titus was next in line to rule, the first emperor to succeed his biological father. His reign lasted just two years and was marked by natural disasters. In his second month as emperor, Mount Vesuvius erupted, burying the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum under molten lava and rock and killing thousands of Roman citizens. The next year, another massive fire broke out in Rome, though it was contained after three days and nights. Titus’s generosity in organizing relief

efforts in the aftermath of these disasters earned him a reputation as a gentle ruler. In CE 80, under Titus, the Flavian Amphitheatre – better known today as the Colosseum – was completed. The next year, Titus was struck by a fever and died, transferring rule of Rome to his brother, Domitian.

Twenty-nine years old, Domitian's rule starkly contrasted with his elder brother's. Suspicious and hungry for power, he terrorized Rome for fifteen years. He was a tyrant, who demanded to be addressed as *dominus et deus*, meaning master and god. He tore down much of the amicability Vespasian and Titus had re-established with the Senate, nullifying the power it had regained and making powerful enemies. Informants consistently told Domitian about potential opponents, who were executed.

Court officials organized a conspiracy to assassinate Domitian. Days before his murder in CE 96, the emperor feigned an injury so he could conceal a dagger in a bandage for protection. A boy steward in his household struck the first blow – stabbing him as he was distracted signing papers at his desk – and in the struggle that ensued, four other conspirators inflicted wounds. Domitian died a month shy of his forty-fifth birthday.

The Senate reasserted powers it had assumed under Vespasian and Titus, ordering the removal of Domitian's name from public places and refusing him a state burial. The functions of the imperial household had been assumed by senators and equestrians, who came to recognize them as vital to the governing of Rome. This governmental body extended its influence over all Roman provinces. With this new foothold, the Senate accomplished what had eluded it before: choosing its emperor. It acted quickly this time, naming Nerva, a respectable, elderly lawyer, within hours of the assassination.

In part, the new emperor was chosen because of his age – he was sixty-five at the start of his reign – and because he was childless. But his lack of an heir also made him vulnerable, a fact that did not escape members of the Praetorian Guard loyal to Domitian. They took Nerva hostage and demanded he hand over those who had conspired to kill Domitian. He complied and survived the ordeal, though his authority suffered damage.

Despite his setbacks, Nerva is credited with ushering in an era known as the Five Good Emperors. Realizing how vulnerable his position was, he sought out a candidate for imperial succession who could win the support of the army and Senate. Nerva adopted a popular soldier named Trajan, and for the last six months of his two-year reign, made him co-ruler. This approach to choosing a successor was Nerva's legacy and resulted in a long period of stability. Rome was in the hands of the greatest rulers it had known. While Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius reigned, the empire was at its height.



# 7

## HEIGHT OF THE EMPIRE

Trajan was born Marcus Ulpius Trianus in CE 53. to a non-patrician family in the province of Hispania Baetica, the southern tip of modern-day Spain. His father was a prominent senator and general. As a young man, Trajan served in the Roman army and rose through its ranks while fighting in some of its most ferocious battles. When his father became governor of Syria in CE 76, Trajan was elected tribune there. In CE 91, he was nominated consul and arrived in Rome with Appollodorus of Damascus, a Greek engineer, architect, designer, and sculptor, whom Trajan respected.

About the same time, Trajan married Pompeia Plotina, a noblewoman from Nimes, a settlement in what today is the south of France. The marriage did not produce a child.

A portrait of marriage at this time in Roman history reveals something about the careful order and ritual, as well as common extravagances, of everyday life. The unions often were arranged by parents or friends with an eye toward status, power, and wealth. During a formal wedding, gifts were heaped on the bride-to-be, including a metal ring placed on the third finger of her hand – which Romans believed was connected, by a nerve, to the heart.

Marital contracts took one of three forms, ranging in formality and freedoms. Only patricians entered into a *confarreatio*, in which the bride surrendered herself and property to her husband. In a *coemptio*, a bride received payment, a symbolic gesture, from her groom. In a *usus*, there was no religious ceremony – a man and woman living together for a year could be considered legally married – and the wife could retain rights to property she owned.

The most formal wedding ceremony was planned and carried out according to ritual. Rarely was a date set in the unlucky weeks of March, May, or half of June. The day before the wedding, the bride's childhood clothing and toys were dedicated to the household gods of her father. Her bridal gown was a special tunic – with a girdle tied in a Hercules knot that only her groom could loosen. She was draped in a saffron cloak and a vibrant orange veil, which was crowned with a floral wreath. Presided over by two priests, the man and woman remained seated through the ceremony on stools covered with a single sheepskin. They ate a sacred wheat cake and clasped hands as their vows were sealed. A feast

followed, then a musical procession to the couple's home, where the bride anointed the door with oil and hung ribbons before being hoisted over the threshold by a member of the wedding party other than her husband, to ensure she did not stumble, which would have been a bad omen. She received gifts from her husband of a torch and filled vessel – symbolizing fire and water, keys to maintaining the household. Using the torch to light a fire on the hearth, she extinguished it and tossed it to the wedding party as a lucky memento to whomever caught it.

Trajan became emperor in CE 98 to great fanfare among the populace, and he was so beloved the Senate honored him with the title of *optimus*, meaning best. Rome enjoyed another period of relative peace, while conquests beyond the Danube – first into Dacia, and later Armenia and Mesopotamia – stretched the boundaries of the empire further than ever.

Trajan had his architect Appollodorus build a 3,500-foot bridge across the Danube and commissioned construction of a canal around the rapids of the Iron Gates. His triumph in Dacia was commemorated with a column more than 100 feet tall, topped with a platform and pedestal on which sat a statue of Trajan – accessible by 185 stairs inside the column. The emperor and his architect collaborated on many building projects in Rome and its provinces, including Trajan's Forum, a monumental complex within the city.

During his reign, a three-month gladiatorial spectacle was staged in the Colosseum – chariot races, close combat, and beast fights drawing 5 million spectators and leaving 11,000 gladiators (plus thousands of animals) dead in the arena.

In Roman provinces, Trajan combated abuses in government by creating another level of oversight, touching off a bureaucratic expansion that would continue for two centuries. The emperor sent curators as advisors or administrators, with specific responsibilities, to supervise municipal governments.

Unparalleled prosperity extended from Rome to the farthest reaches of its borders, evidenced by a surge in public and private philanthropy. The citizens of Rome took pride in their civic contributions.



One example is shared by Pliny the Younger, a lawyer, author, and magistrate whose letters from this era provide an historical record. A wealthy equestrian, Pliny grew up in the town of Como, in northern Italy. Upon learning the children there were without a teacher and so had to be educated twenty-five miles north in Milan, he donated money to hire an instructor in Como. His generosity toward his native land continued all his life and included gifts to support the town's lower-class children and build and maintain a library. In his will, he bequeathed a substantial portion of his fortune to 100 freed men who had been his slaves, stipulating when they died, whatever was left should be put toward a public banquet each year.

This spirit of giving, now more pronounced, was part of the fabric of Rome. On a more individual level, patron-client relationships between wealthier citizens and lower-class people were common. A patrician Roman man became a sponsor for his plebian counterpart, obliged to ensure that person's welfare. This relationship might include protection in lawsuits or a contribution to a daughter's dowry. More often, it took the form of gifts of food or money. But these benefits were not bestowed selflessly. The plebian clients were expected to show gratitude with political allegiances, loyalties, and respect, which was weighed against the level of patronage. If a patron felt disrespected by his client, he could withhold gifts, which were often an out-of-work plebian's sole income.

The government's role in philanthropy went beyond the distribution of grain and free admission to circuses and theaters. The most remarkable example was a welfare program, called the *alimenta*, instituted by Trajan and maintained by nearly two centuries of imperial successors. Initially funded by the spoils of the Dacian War, Trajan expanded the program by allotting the equivalent of the annual imperial budget to establish a system of low-cost farm loans, the interest from which bought food, subsidized education, and provided general support for orphans and children of the poor. Distribution of the funds was not equal – legitimate boys got the largest share, followed by legitimate girls, and lastly illegitimate children – though all received some public assistance.

Boys and girls were educated separately – though not

necessarily unequally. In fact, women often became more educated than men, having more time to devote to studies. Families that could afford a formal education for their children sent boys and girls to gender-segregated classrooms to learn reading, writing, and mathematics from a *litterator* until the age of twelve or thirteen. From that age, girls were tutored at home, while boys were schooled by the grammaticus in Greek and Latin grammar, history, geography, and astronomy until about age sixteen.

A graduation followed for boys – a ceremony marking their coming of age – in which, accompanied by their fathers and surrounded by friends, they exchanged the red-bordered togas of youth for the plain toga virilis, worn by men. The ceremony included a shave and a haircut and culminated with a feast of liberation. Continuing education – the equivalent of college – was offered from the rhetor, a teacher of composition and oration. Those from wealthy families expanded their knowledge by travelling, especially to centers of ancient Greek civilization.

Romans were voracious readers. Grand public libraries – and many private ones – were built and flourished, along with bookshops, where writers gathered to argue and gossip. Two libraries built during Augustus's reign were among Rome's most magnificent, stocked with extensive volumes in Greek and Latin. Written on rolls of papyrus – sometimes numerous pages held together in a bucket-like container – the books filled labeled shelves. By the fourth century, Rome was home to at least twenty-nine public libraries.

## More Magnificence

Trajan's health declined in CE 117, and after Nerva's example, he adopted and trained a successor – the general Hadrian. The emperor died that same year, of edema, and Hadrian assumed the rule of Rome.

Whereas his predecessor expanded the empire's borders, Hadrian sought to shrink them to strengthen Rome. Though he fought with Trajan to secure Armenia and Mesopotamia as Roman provinces, he cast them off as soon as he became emperor – and he considered doing the same with Dacia. Rome's hold on Britain also was diminished, following a rebellion in which a Roman legion was lost. Hadrian's Wall –

spanning eighty miles – separated the Roman-held south of Great Britain from the barbaric north.

Despite his reputation as a soldier, Hadrian's reign was nearly void of military conflict. Once he had stemmed the revolt in Judea that had broken out under Trajan, his policy became one of peace through strength, though threats were employed when necessary. The closest he came to war in his twenty-one years as emperor was against Parthia in CE 121, but a settlement was negotiated to avoid bloodshed. Despite his reluctance to court conflict, Hadrian ensured that the Roman military - in the city and abroad - was well-trained and prepared to defend the empire at a moment's notice. Hadrian inspected the troops, required them to undertake intensive drills, and corrected their faults.

More than half of Hadrian's reign was spent outside the city. His travels took him to nearly every province, where he devoted his attention not just to the Roman military, but also to provincial governments, laws, and infrastructure. Rather than add to the empire through conquest, he looked to expand it from within. He gave orders for new construction, travelling with architects and builders. He standardized Roman law so procedures were the same throughout Rome's territories. The emperor was sympathetic to the plight of the common people and took steps to help ease the burdens of taxes, though his visits were almost certainly a drain, especially on farmers forced to supply provisions for his entourage.

People had a greater sense of unity throughout the empire. In its most scattered dominions, people felt more than tied to Rome's destiny; they felt as if they played a role in Rome's future. As Hadrian traveled the length of his empire, more towns became cities and more cities - granted the Latin Right - became municipalities, the entire population of which were considered Roman citizens. Municipalities sought the prestigious designation of colony, until now reserved for communities established by Rome's founders. To be a colony was to be as Roman as Rome itself - to accept not just its rule, but also its heritage.

Hadrian's first tour culminated in Greece, where he was hailed as a "great restorer." The same praise followed his stop in Sicily on his way back to Rome. Another three-year voyage

took him back to Greece, then Asia and Egypt, where while sailing down the Nile, a boy named Antinous – traveling with Hadrian – drowned. The grief-stricken emperor had the boy deified; cities were named for him, and statues of him were erected throughout the empire.

The revolt in Judea was triggered after a visit from Hadrian, who imposed his name, statues, temples, and laws on cities rebuilt from ruins following its first conflict with Rome. He outlawed circumcision, which he considered bodily mutilation and barbaric, and he attempted to root out Judaism, which he blamed for the rebellions. Some 580,000 Jews were killed in the fighting – and fifty towns and 985 villages razed – before the Romans declared victory in CE 135.

Hadrian's final years were spent in Rome, where he grew ill and weak. Heart failure is believed to have killed him in CE 138. The reign of his adopted son and successor, Antoninus Pius, was the most peaceful in the history of the empire. In his twenty-three years as emperor, he never went within 500 miles of a legion. No historical record of conflict or war during this time exists.

Rome was at its most majestic under Pius and his successor Marcus Aurelius – the last of the five good emperors. Aristides, a visiting professor from Asia Minor, put into words the empire's greatest accomplishment: "I mean your magnificent citizenship with its grand conception . . . there is nothing like it in the records of all mankind. Dividing into two groups all those in your empire, [which covers] the entire civilized world, you have everywhere appointed to your citizenship, and even to kinship with you, the better part of the world's talent, courage and leadership. And the rest you have recognized as a league under your hegemony."

Aurelius rose to power after Pius's death from a fever in CE 161, and he held the position for nineteen years. During that time, the sense of unity and allegiance to Rome was pervasive. People in the provinces reaped the benefits of citizenship, taking their place atop Roman society, with posts in the Senate.

To fight for Rome was to side with good in the battle against evil. This concept was fostered by the emergence of a new cult of Asian influence, dedicated to the god Mithras. He

became known as a deity of truth and light and enemy of darkness. Members of this cult were mostly men – many were soldiers in the Roman army, where Mithraism was popular. It was a fraternity whose members were eager to take up arms for their cause.

In the last years of Marcus Aurelius's reign, the forces of "evil" were converging on Rome at an alarming rate. The empire was beset on all sides – on the Rhine, the Danube, and the Euphrates. Whereas his predecessor never commanded a Roman army, Aurelius assumed the post often. He was a capable commander and kept the borders secure through a series of military campaigns, for which he was at the front. Great generals served him; the most prominent was C. Avidius Cassius, who led a Syrian legion. Yet Aurelius kept close watch on his armies, moving from camp to camp. His *Meditations*, written between battles, have endured as a literary monument to government and duty, though it seems clear Aurelius meant them only as a source for his self-improvement.

Defense of the empire drew heavily from the state treasury, and its civilians, who were called to duty. The Roman currency was devalued again, and along the borders, a lack of manpower led to a reliance on barbarians for farm work – a prelude to more significant problems. At the same time, a plague sapped the peoples' energy and undermined the economy.

At its peak, the empire could rise no higher; only one direction remained. "Our history now plunges," wrote Roman historian Cassius Dio, "from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust."



# 8

## BARBARIANS AT THE GATE

Rome did not fall for another 300 years, though the period following the reign of Marcus Aurelius is considered to be the start of its decline. For Romans living at that time, however, there was no clear indication of what was to come. War, tyrannical rule, political rivalries were all familiar parts of life. Romans had complete confidence that the barbarians threatening the empire's borders would be driven back, like so many others throughout its history. Rome's army was strong and determined, even if its soldiers were motivated by money more than patriotism.

It was probably the plague that killed Aurelius in CE 180. For the first time since Titus succeeded Vespasian in CE 79, the rule of the empire passed from father to biological son. Commodus, named co-emperor at age fifteen, three years prior to his father's death, was groomed for the position. Left to his own devices as sole emperor at eighteen, he emerged as a tyrant – the first of many to come.

Commodus presented himself as a demigod, erecting statues of himself throughout Rome that depicted him as Hercules - a delusion that soon escalated to megalomania. Following a third massive fire that raged for days and destroyed many public buildings and parts of the palace, he sought to recast Rome in his image. He declared himself the new Romulus and issued a decree that the city be renamed Commodiana. He devalued Roman currency, spent frivolously, and took pleasure in public executions. During the Plebeian Games of CE 192, he slaughtered 100 animals every morning with arrows and javelins and participated in gladiator battles every afternoon, winning all bouts. Universally despised, he damaged the reputation of emperor almost beyond repair. Historian Cassius Dio called him "a greater curse to the Romans than any pestilence or crime."

In December 192, a conspiracy formed to assassinate Commodus, first coaxing his mistress to administer a poison, which the emperor vomited up. Ultimately, it was Commodus's wrestling partner, Narcissus, who strangled him in his bath. Twelve years of tyranny ended.

In the tumultuous year that followed, five would lay claim to the title emperor. The first, Pertinax, ruled for only three months. Likely involved in the conspiracy to kill Commodus, Pertinax was installed as emperor by the Praetorian Guard,

which demanded a large payment upon his ascension. When he managed to deliver only half the amount, 300 soldiers marched on the palace and killed him.

Next, the Praetorian Guard demanded payment up front. In a brazen display of power, it put the imperial office up for auction, pledging to install the highest bidder. Cassius Dio describes this “most disgraceful” business: “The would-be buyers were Sulpicianus and Julianus, who vied to outbid each other, one from inside [the military camp], the other from the outside. . . . Some of the soldiers would carry the word to Julianus, ‘Sulpicianus offers so much; how much more do you bid?’ And to Sulpicianus in turn, ‘Julianus promises so much; how much do you raise him?’ Sulpicianus would have won the day, being inside and being a prefect of the city and also the first to name the figure of 20,000 sesterces per soldier, had not Julianus raised his bid no longer by a small amount but by 5,000 at one time, shouting it in a loud voice and also indicating the amount with his fingers.”

People were enraged by the dishonor this action brought on Rome, greeting their new emperor-by-auction, Didius Julianus, with shouts of “robber” and hurled stones. Disgust spread throughout the empire, and several provinces refused to recognize Julianus’s authority. Syria, Pannonia, and Britain proclaimed their generals as emperor. Closest, and therefore deemed by Julianus the greatest threat, Pannonia was commanded by the African-born Septimius Severus. Julianus declared him an enemy, but as Severus marched from the Danube toward Rome, Italy rallied behind him. The Senate decreed Severus as emperor and ordered the execution of Julianus, whose reign amounted to nine weeks.

## **The Severan Dynasty**

Severus had challengers for the rule of Rome – generals Pescennius Niger in Syria and Clodius Albinus in Britain still called themselves emperor. Severus led the Roman army against them, securing his position in battles in CE 193 and 194. His rule was a military dictatorship, and his philosophy was simple: Take care of the army, and all else will fall into place. “Enrich the soldiers, scorn all other men” was his advice to his sons, who would succeed him.

Severus was popular with the people, but his reliance on the



military to gain power made him many enemies in the Senate. To rectify this situation, he ordered several senators executed on charges of conspiring against him and replaced them with his allies. He disbanded the Praetorian Guard, stripping its members of their armor and pledging to kill any who came within 100 miles of Rome.

Enemies still threatened Rome's borders – Parthians to the east and Germans to the north. To fund military campaigns, Severus devalued the Roman currency further, imposed higher and new taxes, and confiscated and sold properties belonging to rivals. These desperate measures only worsened matters. Taxes imposed on the provinces drained their coffers and plunged people into poverty. Higher-class stature was forfeited by many seeking a lower tax bracket. The requirements of war sent Rome into financial ruin. Revenue declined as tax rates increased. Attempts to provide relief – free distribution of food, money, and medicine – put additional strain on the imperial budget.

Severus's first priority was to defend the frontiers. The Roman army was bolstered by the addition of three legions – which required the enlistment of barbarians. Soldiers had new incentives: better pay and more privileges. This, and relaxed restrictions on military life, changed the character of the Roman soldier, which created its own problems, according to historian Herodian. Newly acquired luxuries, such as gold rings they wore on their hands – the insignia of equestrians, a rank Severus aspired to elevate his soldiers to – and permission to live with their wives previously were considered "incompatible with military discipline and with preparedness and readiness for war," Herodian wrote. Severus, he continued, "was the first to undermine their famous vigor . . . teaching them to covet money and turning them aside to luxurious living."

Severus's professional soldiers were molded on the battleground for high-ranking government, civil-service, and military commands. The emperor dispatched bureaucrats and merged his military with his administration. "The emperor and his council," one historian noted, "now resembled a general and his staff, with the equestrian civil servants as their executive officers."

The military and government had mixed before, with great

commanders rising through the ranks to rule Rome, but not to this extent. People plucked from the provinces were trained as soldiers, then polished for public office. The majority who rose to high governmental rank during Severus's reign were provincials from the East and Africa. Provincial languages began to appear in legal documents and on road markers in Gaul and along the Rhine.

Although this infiltration of the army into government disturbed the establishment, it did not trouble Severus. He held no special reverence for Rome's customs. His family had been wealthy equestrians, but he was born in the provinces, in the old Phoenician town of Leptis Magna, and he remained loyal to the provinces. His father was Punic, and that heritage was distinguishable in Severus's accent, whether he spoke Latin or Greek.

While leading a military campaign in Britain in CE 211, Severus fell ill. He was forced to withdraw from battle prematurely and died. His reign had lasted eight years and signaled the start of the Severan Dynasty, which ruled Rome twenty-four years after his death. Severus was succeeded by his sons, Caracalla and Geta, who ruled jointly for a short time before Caracalla had his younger brother killed.

Heeding his father's advice, Caracalla raised his soldiers' wages, as well as the bounties paid to barbarian chieftains to deter attacks along weak points on the frontier. These expenses drained the treasury, forcing higher taxes on people and another devaluation of the currency. Motivated by a need to increase revenue, Caracalla decreed all free men in the empire citizens of Rome, then taxed them, too.

Despite the war-driven drain on Rome's economy, Caracalla managed at least one extravagance. He built the second largest, best preserved, and most magnificent of Rome's public bath houses, the Baths of Caracalla. Easily accommodating more than 2,000 people, it included libraries, club and game rooms, and was appointed with gold-trimmed marble, columns, mosaics, and statues.

Caracalla's reign lasted six years, during which he ingratiated himself with his soldiers by heaping benefits on them and eating, marching, and training alongside them. Portraits of him as emperor show the close-cropped hairstyle of a soldier

– a departure from the appearance the philosopher-emperors who preceded him favored. In the end, one of his bodyguards betrayed him. Turning his back to urinate on a roadside while on his way to a battlefield in Parthia, Caracalla was stabbed to death by a man who, according to Cassius Dio, was resentful at not being named centurion.

The last of the Severan Dynasty emperors was Alexander Severus, who ruled from CE 222 to 235. Leading his army against a German invasion in Gaul, Alexander deployed a familiar military tactic and attempted to bribe enemy leaders to buy time. Roman soldiers disdained this practice; they preferred to fight. The troops turned on their emperor, assassinating him on the Rhine. This set off a period in Rome known as the Crisis of the Third Century, fifty years in which more than twenty men, most ruthless, laid claim to the title of emperor.

## **The Crisis of the Third Century**

The ruler in the post-Severan age was a crude, towering Thracian soldier named Maximinus. His rise through the ranks was possible because of Severus, who had made a soldier of the shepherd, and Caracalla, who granted citizenship to him and all freed men of Rome. The Senate saw Maximus as a barbarian. He was the first emperor never before to have stepped foot in Rome.

Desperation settled over opulent Rome. "After reducing most of the notable houses to poverty, and finding the income obtained thereby small and insufficient for his purpose," Herodian wrote, "Maximinus began to lay hands on the public treasuries."

As Maximus led his troops in defense of the frontiers, the Senate defied him by naming two of its members as co-emperors. Four years after assuming power, Maximus marched on Rome, only to be killed by his men. The senators' hold on the empire, however, was weak and ended in a brutal military coup after only three months. Soldiers asserted their power over the empire for half a century, decades marred by civil wars, increasingly aggressive barbarian threats to Rome's borders, economic disaster, and the never-ending problems of plague and famine.

With political order shattered, succession was claimed through violence. As such, reigns during this era were brief, and almost always ended in the spilling of blood. The plague killed one emperor, and Persians captured another – perhaps a preferable end compared to the fate that befell others, slain by the same swords that enabled their ascension, wielded by men whose sole motive was profit.

During this dark period, battles within Rome only distracted its leaders from threats without. Rome's enemies took advantage of the situation, breaching the empire's frontiers in nearly every direction. Syrian and Egyptian provinces, and all of Asia Minor, were beset by Persians. Franks and Alemanni invaded Gaul and Spain. Berber tribes bombarded Africa. Roman soldiers were dispatched to drive back the invaders, but they were just as destructive, leaving behind them communities in ruin.

By CE 260, the Roman Empire had splintered into two parts: Provinces in Gaul, Britain, and Spain formed the Gallic Empire and in the east, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria comprised the Palmyrene Empire. The financial collapse was complete; the empire's primary silver coins were 90 percent lead. Goods and commodities – the price of which soared through inflation – were paid to soldiers and civil servants. A bank in Egypt refused to accept Roman currency and sought to put 300-year-old Ptolemaic coins back into circulation.

Suddenly, being a citizen of Rome, once considered an honor, was a hardship. Even high-ranking officials were burdened, and previously sought-after positions became obligatory. Magistrates of towns that failed to produce enough revenue to pay the customary tribute to Rome were compelled to pay it out of their own pocket. The Senate, too, was sapped of much of its power and prestige.

## **A Shaky Stability**

Diocletian, whose twenty-one-year rule stabilized the empire and marked the end of the Crisis of the Third Century, had no respect for the Senate. He dated his reign from his elevation by his army, not by ratification by the Senate. Born to peasant parents in the poor province of Dalmatia, he joined the the Roman army and eventually was promoted to commander of a cavalry. His rise paralleled that of many

common soldiers who laid claim to the role of emperor before him. Similarly, he led military campaigns in Rome's embattled frontiers. Though a disciplined general, his deftness at reorganizing the political machine restored order, pulled the empire back from the brink of collapse, and maintained it for another century.

He styled himself an autocrat – his rule supreme, his word final, his right divine – and elevated himself above the masses, expecting all to bow before him in adoration. But both his military and political successes were the result of a division of power.

To purge the frontiers of threats to the empire, Diocletian grew the Roman army, but divided it into smaller units - more commanders, each with fewer men and less likely to revolt. "The frontiers of the Roman Empire were everywhere studded with cities and forts and towers," Greek historian Zosimus wrote, "and the whole army was stationed along them, so that it was impossible for the barbarians to break through."

Diocletian did the same in government. His reforms created the largest bureaucracy Rome ever knew. Rome's roughly fifty provinces were carved into more than a hundred smaller ones. He sectioned Italy into at least eight districts. This change required a greater call to civil service, adding layers of politicians and paperwork to the administration, and sparked a massive overhaul of the political structure of the empire. Provinces were bundled into *dioceses*, under the leadership of a vicar.

One Roman official noted in CE 288, "It is apparent from the accounts alone that many persons wishing to batten on the estates of the treasury have devised titles for themselves, such as administrators, secretaries, or superintendents, whereby they procure no advantage for the treasury but eat up the revenues."

The restructuring went straight to the top, where Diocletian established a tetrarchy – or rule of four. He shared the title of Augustus with a co-emperor named Maximian and appointed two junior emperors, to be groomed for succession, with the title of Caesar. The two emperors divided rule of the empire – Diocletian over the eastern territories of Asia, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Thrace; Maximian concentrated on the west –

though Diocletian continued to assert himself as supreme authority. They assigned provinces to the two Caesars so the empire was divided into four prefectures.

Diocletian was progressive in his economic policies. An attempt to curb inflation by setting price controls on goods and wages was meticulously calculated. Those found setting prices above the maximum allowed by the state were subject to execution. Perhaps too strict and far-reaching, when the emperor's edict was posted, Lactantius wrote, "Nothing appeared on the market because of fear, and prices soared much higher." He was forced to abandon the plan.

More taxes were being collected as commodities rather than currency. A census was organized, which recorded details about each household and its holdings, including the number and condition of olive trees on any property. Censuses first were conducted at five-year and then fifteen-year intervals. It allowed administrators to closely watch and demand more of people, now obligated to farm their lands and produce primarily for the benefit of Rome.

While on a military campaign in CE 304 against the Carpi on the Danube, Diocletian contracted an illness. Appearing in public later that year to dedicate the opening of a circus near the palace, he collapsed. He spent that winter inside the palace, as rumors of his imminent death swirled. Rome went into mourning, though it was premature. The emperor, weak and emaciated, reemerged the next spring. In May 305, with tears he declared to the crowd assembled before a statue of the god Jupiter that he was too weak to continue as emperor, becoming the first Roman leader to abdicate power voluntarily. His co-emperor Maximian stepped down at the same time.

Diocletian's tetrarchy collapsed. His chosen successors, the two Caesars, were challenged within a year by soldiers trying to dictate the rule of Rome. By CE 311, four were laying claim to the title of Augustus.

## **Constantine**

Among these was Constantine, whose share of the empire consisted of Britain, Gaul, and Spain. In a series of civil wars against his rivals, he eventually, in CE 324, won sole rule of

the empire and became its first Christian emperor. Prior to these contests, his biographer Eusebius writes, Constantine had a vision – a cross in the sky, inscribed *hoc signo vince*, meaning by this sign you win your victory. His soldiers wore a Christian monogram: the first two letters in Christ's name.

As far back as Nero's rule, Christianity had been sporadically persecuted, but it still managed to take root and spread.

Some influential Romans were among its converts.

Constantine's ascension brought not only wider acceptance in Rome, but it also brought government sanction. The emperor was in a position to divert state funds to church coffers and appoint bishops to official capacities.

In CE 313, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, stating that Christians should be able to profess their faith without oppression, rescinding state penalties, and returning confiscated church property. Christian writers conceded that being a good Christian and a good Roman were not mutually exclusive. Still, Christians and non-Christians clashed regularly. Even Constantine was conflicted about religion. A triumphal arch built to honor one of his victories in battle features the goddess Victoria; its dedication included sacrifices to the gods Apollo, Diana, and demigod Hercules. Constantine called on Christians and non-Christians to unite in observing the day of the sun. Yet the most famous buildings he added to the Roman landscape were Christian: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Old Saint Peter's Basilica.

Constantine's thirteen-year reign bound the people of Rome more than ever to their empire. No effort was expended, nor job undertaken, that did not somehow serve Rome and its bureaucracy. A young Roman's path was set from birth, to inherit his father's obligations – whether in craft, trade, government, or military service. The fate of tenant farmers and landlords was inextricably linked to the land, by an edict that guaranteed the state receive its share from the arrangement and set restrictions on sale and transfer of property.

Despite the effort, the Roman economy had no chance of rebounding. One Gallic citizen wrote to Constantine that the tax assessments had "drained our very life."

Rome, once teeming with life and meaning, had been reduced to nothing more than a symbol. In 324 A.D., Constantine abandoned the city to establish a new imperial capital in the East. He called it New Rome, but to honor him, Romans dedicated it Constantinople. Built over the ruins of the ancient Greek city of Byzantium, in modern-day Turkey, it replicated Rome in layout and borrowed heavily from its temples and monuments. It became the capital of the Byzantine Empire, which Romans ruled for another 1,100 years, long after the Western Roman Empire had crumbled.

Constantine spent much of his later life in Constantinople, which he considered his permanent residence. From there, he led military campaigns against the Goths and Persians. He fell ill in 337 A.D., and realizing death was near, was baptized in the Jordan River – some say he put this ritual off as long as he did in order to be absolved from as much sin as possible. He died soon after, to be succeeded by three sons. Christian historians posthumously added to his name “the Great.”

## **Frontiers (and More) Fall**

Nearly forty years later, several Germanic tribes infiltrated the Danube frontier, with others close behind. It was no longer possible to hold back the barbarians, who had established their own kingdoms within the empire. But the empire they laid claim to was greatly diminished by the ravages of war. Ammianus, the last great Roman historian, describes it as a land hounded by “the burden of tributes and the repeated increase in taxes . . . crushed by the severity of the dunning tax-collectors.” Toiling the fields were “women driven along by cracking whips, and stupefied with fear, still heavy with their unborn children, which before coming into the world endured many horrors.”

In 378 A.D., at the Battle of Adrianople, a city in eastern Thrace, the barbarian forces crushed the Roman army, killing Emperor Valens, sometimes known as the Last True Roman. Visigoths sacked Rome in 410 A.D., marking the first time in 800 years that the city had fallen to an enemy, leaving it facing a terrible famine. Forty-five years later, the city was besieged again, for fourteen days. It was no longer the capital of the Western Roman Empire, but Rome endured as the seat of the church and as a great monument. It remained the symbolic heart of Italy. Even in ruins, its beauty surpassed



the emerging European cities until the Renaissance.



# 9

## LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Conventional thought maintains that the Western Roman Empire ended on September 4, 476 A.D., when a Germanic soldier named Odoacer deposed Romulus Augustus, considered the last of the Roman emperors, and declared himself King of Italy. But the fall of a civilization traditionally indicates – beyond the collapse of its government – a vanishing of its culture and the extinction of its way of life. When considered in those terms, Rome still stands. Its cultural survival was secured in ideas and beliefs planted in the far reaches of its vast empire. Though remote provinces no longer were bound to Rome, its influence already had seeped deep into their fabric. To some degree, each was a replica of Rome, and through them, Rome lived on.

Romanism persisted, shaping Western culture for generations. Western art, language, science, and architecture is tinged with Roman heritage. Much of Rome's mark is clear and concrete, as in the classic facade of many public buildings. The rest has become so ingrained in thought and methodology that its Roman origin is often forgotten. But its path from then to now is simple to trace. The ideas and fashions of Rome were preserved and passed on through the Byzantine Empire, with Constantinople as its capital until 1453. The Roman Catholic Church carried on its faith and spirit. Nearly all who came in contact with the Romans adopted their style.

Hastily built with materials – columns, marble, doors, and tiles – repurposed from the city of Rome, Constantinople came into its own. By the twelfth century, it was Europe's largest and wealthiest city. It became more than a replica of Rome. But in its genesis, Rome is what it aspired to be. Its seven hills and fourteen regions replicated the layout of Rome. Its political structure, though scaled back at first, mirrored Rome's. It was ruled by emperors and governed by a proconsul appointed by a Senate. But it lacked the bureaucracy of praetors, tribunes, or quaestors that had been built up over centuries in Rome. In its early heyday, administrative offices for the regulation of food, police, statues, temples, sewers, aqueducts, and other public works did not exist. Modelled after the Roman Forum, a new public square called the Augustaeum included on its east side the Senate house, or Curia, and the Great Palace of the Emperor to the south. The Hippodrome seated more than 80,000 for chariot races. Built on the site of a former temple to Jupiter (or Zeus), the Baths

of Zeuxippus were noted as much for their magnificent sculptures – of which there were more than eighty – as their elegant bathing areas.

To those who ruled this New Rome, the fall of the Western Empire was not regarded as fatal. Following the example of Constantine, emperors embraced Christianity, expanded civil service, and imparted Roman-style discipline on their armies. As late as the fifteenth century, its citizens still referred to themselves as *Romaioi* - Romans.

Soon, however, outside influences began to change the Roman style upon which the capital was built. Hellenic and Oriental patterns mixed with Roman motifs on buildings and monuments. Columnar Roman architecture was draped in lace and ornamental Byzantine mosaics. Oriental domes began to punctuate the landscape. Brocaded robes of mandarin origin replaced togas. Most people spoke Greek, though Latin was the official language until the late sixth century.

Constantinople had become a center of Christianity, but theological disputes caused a schism in the church that produced eastern (Greek) and western (Latin) branches. These would become the Eastern Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church. In 1053, the Patriarch of Constantinople ordered all Latin churches in the capitol shuttered. The next year, the papal legate excommunicated Constantinople's Patriarch, who refused to recognize the pope's authority. This touched off a centuries-long conflict in the church that has never been resolved.

It was the Eastern Empire, though, that carried Christianity as far afield as Russia. With it, a brand of Romanism crept into Russian society. The Church of Russia owes its founding to the Byzantine Church and Constantinople. Following the sack of Constantinople by the Turks, Moscow fashioned itself a Third Rome. Moscow's Grand Dukes declared themselves successors to Constantine and descendants of a brother of Rome's first emperor, Augustus. Russians, for a brief period, adopted Roman coins as currency and modeled laws on the Justinian code.

Despite doctrinal disagreements, the Catholic Church stayed true to its Roman roots and its universal outlook. Whereas

the prestige of Rome once had unified Europe, it fell to the church to continue that unity.

The organization of the church follows a Roman model. Ecclesiastical districts presided over by bishops became dioceses – a term first used in the division of administration under Emperor Diocletian. Prior to the adoption of this term, early bishops were assigned to *curia* – a term in Rome which referred to a political subdivision and later its Senate house. Roman jurisprudence influenced the laws of the church, especially as it related to individual congregations within the church.

The church's East-West schism contributed to the decline in the Latin language in the Eastern Empire. But Latin culture thrived in the Roman Catholic Church. Its schools continued to teach it, and it remains a functioning language, only nominally changed.

Christian scholars have studied great works of Roman literature extensively. "We should participate in the pagan literature," wrote Saint Basil, who included the warning: "just as in plucking the blooms from a rose bed we avoid the thorns, so also in garnering from such writings whatever is useful, let us guard against what is harmful."

In this way, Roman culture was infused into American life. President John Adams is said to have recited many of Cicero's orations in the privacy of his room at night. Thomas Jefferson brought Roman architecture to prominence in the United States, designing his home, Monticello, in the columnar style of Rome. At his prompting, the Virginia State Capitol took on the look of a Roman temple, and the University of Virginia's library became a small-scale Pantheon, with brick and wood in place of marble.

Romans were masterful and meticulous builders, and it is the practicality and sturdiness of their architecture that has kept it relevant in the modern world. "The Romans had the best foresight in those matters which the Greeks took but little account of," wrote the first century historian Strabo, "such as the construction of roads and aqueducts, and of sewers that could wash out the filth of the city."

The Roman architect was required to be multi-talented and

knowledgeable in a great number of disciplines. One such architectural genius was Vitruvius, who was favored by Emperor Augustus. He wrote that only by understanding medicine could he answer "questions of climate . . . air, the healthiness and unhealthiness of sites, and water supply." To comply with building codes, an architect had to be a student of the law; and the study of optics taught that "light in buildings can be properly drawn from definite quarters of the sky."

Vitruvius's *On Architecture*, became an instruction manual not just for Romans, but for architects up to and through the Renaissance. Andrea Palladio, who designed Vicenza's Olympic Theatre in 1580, drew inspiration from Vitruvius. Dedicated in 1585, after the architect's death, it was a model for many later Renaissance theaters.

Roman builders combined quicklime with volcanic rock and ash to create concrete, a revolutionary material that could be molded into arches, vaults, and domes. With it, Romans overcame ancient limits of height and space imposed by brick and stone. This new material facilitated the building of aqueducts, produced numerous bridges, and gave rise to the dome as the basis for much of Roman architecture.

For centuries, the great architecture of Rome stood the test of time. The city was ravaged by fires and earthquakes and sacked and plundered by invaders. In more prosperous times, great expense and care was taken to repair and restore its magnificent public structures. But as the population dwindled and the treasury was depleted after the fourth century, decay set in. Some structures still stand relatively intact; the majesty of others is seen in fragments. The outer south side of the Colosseum collapsed in an earthquake in 1349, and much of the rubble was used in building projects throughout the city. The Roman Forum was cannibalized similarly. As the public buildings and temples fell into disrepair, they were dismantled. After the eighth century, the stone and concrete columns and arches appeared in feudal towers and castles. Five hundred years later, these were torn down, and the site became a dumping ground. In 1431, a Renaissance writer observed: "The Roman Forum, the most celebrated place in the city . . . and the nearby Comitium, where magistrates were chosen, are now deserted through the malignance of Fortune. The one is given over to swine and cattle; the other

is enclosed as a vegetable garden.”

Yet the layout of the Forum has been emulated in great cities of later centuries, such as Washington, D.C., where commanding complexes surround a large open space.

Over 500 years, Roman engineers established a system of roads that spanned the entire empire. Originally intended to facilitate quick deployment of troops to defend its territories, the roadways solidified Rome as a trading crossroads. The saying that all roads lead to Rome refers to this fact.

Measured from the Golden Milestone in the Roman Forum, six-foot pillars counted off the miles and credited emperors who commissioned the roads. An inscription on one such marker along the Danube reads: “The emperor [Trajan] . . . built this road by cutting through mountains and eliminating the curves.” No natural obstruction was allowed to inhibit passage through Rome. Engineers tunnelled through mountains, bridged valleys, and cut across the countryside. Paved concrete and stone created durable highways, some of which remain usable today. Rome’s first major artery, the Appian Way, completed in 312 BCE, is one such enduring avenue.

The Romans took pride in their system of aqueducts, which must be counted among the most splendid of their achievements. “Water,” Strabo said, “is brought into the city . . . in such quantities that veritable rivers flow through the city and the sewers.” Eleven aqueducts facilitated the flow of about 200 million gallons of water a day.

Commissioned by a praetor named Quintus Marcius Rex in 144 BCE, the sixty-mile Aqua Marcia aqueduct was the first to employ arches to elevate its conduits. These maintained a gradual slope that carried water from its source in the hills to the city. The Aqua Marcia was known for its high pressure and cold, pure water. Some of Rome’s aqueducts are still in use, including the Aqueduct of Segovia in Spain. It transports water from mountains through nine miles and 167 arches once it enters the city.

## **The Rule of Law**

Romans often exacted brutal, bloody justice for crimes

against the state or its people. Grudges and rivalries were settled violently, often without the involvement of any court authority. Punishments were severe. But the world is a more just place because of 1,000 years of Roman law, which more than anything else the empire left behind, provides a window to the Roman mentality.

The word justice derives from the Latin *ius*, which means law. Although the Romans' *Ius Commune* (common law) is no longer in practice today, many of its concepts have shaped Western legal tradition – with some nearly intact. Impartiality is the most essential of these. Cicero spoke of the Roman spirit of justice: "What sort of thing is the civil law? It is of a sort that cannot be bent by influence or broken by power or spoiled by money." It is written by Saint Luke, in the New Testament, that "it is not the Roman custom to condemn any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to defend himself against the charge."

Early Roman law was bound by religion – strict, symbolic, and conservative – and subject to interpretation from its monarchs. Sextus Pomponius, a first century A.D. jurist, wrote, "At the beginning of our city, the people began their first activities without any fixed law, and without any fixed rights: All things were ruled despotically, by kings."

Rome's first legal text was the *Twelve Tables*, proposed in the mid-fourth century BCE by a plebeian tribune to prevent magistrates from applying the law arbitrarily. According to Livy, the task of recording laws fell to ten Roman citizens, who initially inscribed ten tablets with them. When these were deemed insufficient, two more tablets were added and approved by the people's assembly. Probably destroyed in the Gallic invasion of Rome in 387 BCE, only fragments of the tablets survived. Instead of a list of rules, their content suggests specific provisions for changing certain customs regarding public behavior.

All law in Rome was essentially civil law; its primary function was to protect and assert an individual's rights. Criminal law, prosecuting and punishing crimes, only emerged toward the end of the empire. Prior to that, even murder was a civil matter to be presented by the victim's family to a magistrate, who could decide if the death was accidental or intentional. A ruling of intentional meant the family was free to exact



revenge.

A sort of tort law was spelled out in the Lex Aquilia, written in the third century BCE. It established standards for compensating for damage done unlawfully to a property owner.

These laws formed the basis of Roman legal code for nearly 1,000 years. But, more than well-crafted statutes, professional jurists set standards that influenced modern justice. In the first and second centuries BCE, the power to modify and adapt laws to meet Rome's changing needs was given to magistrates, whose interpretations set legal precedent. Jurists served a different function. Their opinions were given at the request of private parties, in advisements to magistrates who administered justice.

The first two-and-a-half centuries A.D. brought a new sophistication to the Roman legal system. Jurists wrote legal commentaries and treatises, which became law textbooks. The profession of lawyer emerged. Emperors sought advice from legal scholars. As Rome progressed from republic to empire, standards of law based on human wisdom and consent prevailed.

With jurists, magistrates, scholars, and emperors weighing in, the pages of Roman law were scattered throughout the empire. Around 527 A.D., Emperor Justinian sought to collect them in a single document, called the Corpus Iuris Civilis, or body of civil law. Rulers before had encouraged the standardization and classification of laws, but none had achieved it to this degree. It was comprised of three parts, all given the force of law. The most fundamental section of the Corpus - the Justinian Code - was a compilation of imperial edicts and enactments to date. Another section was devoted to excerpts from the written legal opinions of jurists. The last was a textbook, introducing concepts of the Code.

The Corpus was intended to be the sole source of law. It also serves as a history; by the time of its publication, the empire had already expired. The team employed by the emperor to assemble it dictated, by inclusion or exclusion, Rome's lasting legal impressions. It has been translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, and finally in 1932, English. Its concepts have a place in modern legal codes throughout the

Western world:

No one is compelled to defend a cause against his will.

No one suffers a penalty for what he thinks.

No one may be forcibly removed from his own house.

Anything not permitted the defendant ought not be allowed the plaintiff.

The burden of proof is upon the party affirming, not on the party denying.

A father is not a competent witness for a son, nor a son for a father.

The gravity of a past offense never increases ex post facto.

In inflicting penalties, the age and inexperience of the guilty party must be taken into account.

When Napoleon directed the establishment of a French civil code in 1804, his commission drew not from earlier French laws, but from the Justinian Code. It became the Napoleonic Code, and like its model, divided law into persons, property, and actions. Until 1900, the Germans applied Roman law in cases not dictated by local legislation. While England, and later America, developed a native common law that differed from the Romans', the two were similar in principle and practice. Louisiana state laws retained from when as a territory it was governed by Napoleon, still reflect provisions of the ancient Justinian Code.

## **Immortal Words**

Rome's mark on the world, its place in history, and its immortality have been postulated in by historians and statesmen. Its prestige and culture are woven into legends and lore that continue to give it life today. Writings and orations from the era in which the empire thrived are more than historical records. They survived to be studied, interpreted, and emulated by all who came after. The literature and logic of Rome has left as lasting an impression as the concrete and marble structures that still dot the landscape. Rome's legacy is preserved on the page, carved in

tablets, and bound in volumes that have extended its reach beyond its once-vast empire to every corner of the world. We are different because there were Romans; the world is changed by the story of Rome.

This legacy is foreshadowed in a poem composed by Rutilius Namatianus of Gaul in 416 A.D.: "Spread forth the laws that are to last throughout the ages . . . thou alone needst not dread the distaffs of the Fates. . . . The span which doth remain is subject to no bounds, so long as earth shall stand and heaven uphold the stars!" Its timing – six years after Goths had sacked the city, and just three decades before Rome's collapse was complete – suggest the power of the empire was evident, even in its declining years.

The dissemination of Latin to Rome's provinces kept the language vital for centuries after Roman sovereignty had passed. Students in Gaul studies Latin, some surpassing those in Rome. Languages in the former Roman provinces of France, Portugal, Romania, and Spain incorporate Latin. Its roots are similarly found in English. Anglo-Saxons, once presided over by Romans in their German homeland, carried much of the Latin that survives in the English language to Britain. For example, the Latin word for paved, *strata*, became *strete* in Middle English, which has translated to street in modern English. British scholars saw Latin to be superior to their own language, and so it was used to construct much of the rules of English grammar.

The classical and dignified Latin verse of Roman antiquity inspired many Renaissance poets, such as Boccaccio and Petrarch. Roman authors developed a magnificent literature that rivals any in history. The Romans were innovative in instructional poetry, history, and satire –setting standards that all of Europe aspired to meet.

Considered to be the originator of the Latin language and the father of Roman drama, Livius Andronicus was an educator in the service of noble family in the third century BCE. His earliest work – and history's first surviving record of the Latin language – is a translation of Home's Greek epic the *Odyssey*, which was a teaching tool in the school he founded. Livius also wrote letters in Latin and translated Greek dramas into Latin plays. A style of comedy the Romans called *comoedia palliata*, inspired by the Greek, is attributed to Livius.

Whereas Livius earned his reputation mostly as a teacher and translator, Gnaeus Naevius gave Rome many original Latin works, including a historical epic and several plays. A native Italian, he raised the language to its own level and made it more than a variation of Greek. But his originality drew the hostility of some Roman nobles, whom he mocked and criticized on stage. He was first imprisoned, then exiled. In a self-important epitaph composed toward the end of his career as a dramatist, he wrote: "If immortals were allowed to weep for mortals, the divine Muses would weep for the poet Naevius. And so after he was delivered to the strongbox of Orc[h]us, Romans forgot how to speak the Latin language."

Born to an equestrian family, a writer named Lucilius twisted his words like a knife into the Roman establishment. He wrote volumes, mostly in hexameters, about the corruption of government, the sordid lives of the middle class, and societal vices. Thus, he was Rome's first true satirist. What remains of his works is scant – about 1,100 unconnected lines from thirty books of satires.

Two other poets writing in Rome during the first century BCE took a more internal approach to analytical Latin. Lucretius studied and expounded on matters of the mind and soul, sensation, and thought. His philosophical *On the Nature of Things* – his only published work to survive – explores at length Epicureanism, which argues against the fear of divinity that ruled the lives of many Romans. Catullus's works, meanwhile, were sensitive, romantic, and full of restrained passion. Among his lyrical odes to the virtues and labors of love were a series devoted to a mistress he called Lesbia. Her real name was Clodia. She was married to a Roman nobleman and at least ten years older than Catullus. Several stages of their relationship is described in his poems, starting with the initial euphoria and progressing through doubts that led to separation and heartbreaking loss.

Lucretius wrote more methodically and with less flourish than Catullus, but his influence on his immediate successor, Virgil, helped to usher in the most dazzling half-century of Roman literature.

Widely considered one of Rome's greatest poets, Virgil wrote during the reign of its first emperor, Augustus. A farmer's son, he reflects on the land and the loss of his family farm -

seized by the empire as reward for its veterans following a war - in the *Eclogues*. He followed up with the *Georgics*, four volumes of the most meticulous verse he ever composed: "But neither flowering groves Of Media's realm, nor Ganges proud, Nor Lydian fountains flowing thick with gold, Can match their glories with Italia . . . . Hail, O Saturn's land, Mother of all good fruits and harvests fair, Mother of men!"

Virgil's *Aeneid*, though unfinished, is considered the national epic of ancient Rome and one of the most vital poems in all of western literature. Having worked on it for ten years, he travelled to Greece to make revisions. There, he met with the emperor and contracted a fever that hastened his return to Rome. Before he left, he gave his literary executors instructions to burn his uncompleted manuscript in the event of his death. He died on the voyage. Against Virgil's wishes, Augustus ordered the *Aeneid* published with as few changes as possible. In its final form, a few unfinished lines remain, along with common faults Virgil had intended to correct in the editing process, but the epic's impact is undiminished.

In twelve volumes, the *Aeneid* tells the harrowing adventure of the founding of Rome, from the Trojan hero Aeneas's escape after the fall of Troy to his conquest of Latium. For Virgil, however, the story and its characters are secondary to the glory and splendor of Rome, on which he takes every opportunity to expound. Upon Aeneas's descent into the underworld, he meets the unborn heroes of Rome's future - among whom is Augustus:

This is he whom again and again you have heard in the promise

Of prophecy, Caesar Augustus, son of a god.

He shall found once again an era of gold in the land

Of Latium, throughout the fields that Saturn once ruled.

The *Aeneid* seems modelled after two epic poems by Homer, the first half often compared to the *Odyssey* and the second half to the *Iliad*. But it has since become the prime example of the style for generations of poets. In the sixteenth century, Jerome Vida wrote six volumes of poetry on the life of Christ, entitled the *Christiads*, for which he clearly stated his

intentions to imitate Virgil as much as possible.

The works of the poet Horace, during the last half of the first century BCE, were also deeply personal – and equally mimicked by generations of writers to follow. Horace may have been Rome's first autobiographer, writing more about himself than any other Latin authors. He inspired, among others, nineteenth-century poet John Keats, whose optimistic "Ode to a Nightingale" follows the forms of Horace.

The Roman sagas, their heroes and villains, have manifested in masterworks by a multitude of writers through the ages. William Shakespeare told the story of Caesar and Antony. A dozen plays feature the tyrannical Emperor Nero. French Nobel Prize-winning author Albert Camus made a sympathetic monster of Caligula in his play of the same name. In English poet Robert Graves's *I, Claudius*, the paralytic fourth emperor of Rome emerges as a shrewd intellectual.

As with all things, the literature of Rome and its influences are tied prominently to their gods, faith, and relationship with the church. A student of Rome, St. Jerome translated the Bible into Latin in the fourth century A.D. – his Vulgate Bible becoming the standard text in Roman Catholic services. Around the same time, Rome's final literary masterpiece was composed by Christian theologian St. Augustine. In his *Confessions*, he evokes his love of God in prose that borders on lyric poetry: "But what do I love when I love Thee? . . . I love a kind of light, and melody, and fragrance, and meat, and embracement when I love my God, the light, melody, fragrance, meat, embracement of my inner man: where there shineth unto my soul what space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breathing disperseth not, and there tasteth what eating diminished not, and there clingeth what satiety divorceth not. This is it which I love when I love my God."

As the Western Empire disintegrated, Augustine casts the Catholic Church as a *City of God* in constant conflict with the earthly City of Man. The latter, with its devotion to earthly pleasure and neglect of the eternal truths, is doomed to perish. But the City of God is immortal.

Thus, ordained by the gods, the city of Rome, on which was built an empire, lives on - a city made immortal by its lasting

contributions to society, art, architecture, government, law, language, and faith.



# GALLERY





The ruins of ancient Rome are clearly visible in this aerial photo. The earliest written account of the founding Rome by the twin brothers Romulus and Remus dates to the third century BCE.



This statue shows the she-wolf feeding Romulus and Remus in the Lupercal, a cave on Palatine Hill. Legend says it was in this cave that the shepherd Faustulus found the boys and took them home to raise them with his wife.



The Temple of Vesta, dedicated to the goddess of the hearth, was used to house the eternal flame that symbolized the eternal nature of Rome. If the flame was extinguished, Romans believed, their empire was doomed. The temple, located in the Roman Forum, was destroyed many times, by fire and invaders, and was subsequently rebuilt until 1549, when it was demolished and its marble used to build churches and papal palaces.



Two thousand years ago, most of the known world was directly affected by decisions made in the Roman Forum. What visible today is a pale, rubble-strewn version of the once-majestic site - now surrounded by modern boulevards packed with speeding cars.



Circus Maximus, the largest sports stadium in Rome, was used primarily for chariot races. At one point, it boasted a capacity of 250,000. Although no one knows exactly when the arena was built, its use by the fourth century BCE has been documented, confirming that it is the oldest public arena in Rome.





This temple in the Forum Boarium, dedicated to Hercules Victor – “Hercules the Winner” - dating from the second century BCE, is one of the best preserved temples in Rome. During the Middle Ages, it was incorporated into a church, which accounts for its remarkably good condition. It was once a part of the Roman cattle market.



The House of Vestal Virgins in the Roman Forum was a palace where the priestesses and the goddesses of the hearth, known as the Vestal Virgins, lived. Not much of this fifty-room palace has survived; all that can be admired today are a few remaining walls and statues – many of them headless - standing in an open courtyard.



The Basilica Julia in the Roman Forum was a courthouse and also home to a few shops. Erected by Julius Caesar in 54 BCE, it burned to the ground soon after its dedication. Augustus rebuilt it in 12 BCE, but it was destroyed again by fire in CE 283 and by the Visigoths in 410 during their sack of Rome. It subsequently fell into ruin and remained unused until the seventh or eighth century, when part of what was left of the basilica was converted into a church.





The Forum of Caesar, designed both as a shrine to himself and as a place to conduct senatorial business, was the first of the imperial forums built to relieve overcrowding at the Roman Forum. Its construction began in 54 BCE and was completed in 46 BCE.



Curia Julia was the senate house of ancient Rome, an imposing structure built in 44 BCE during the reign of Julius Caesar. Erected in the heart of the city, today it stands intact thanks to its conversion in CE 623 into the Church of Saint Antonio on the order of Pope Honorius I.



The tomb of Rome's first emperor, Augustus, also held the remains of his wife, Livia, as well as other emperors and public figures. Augustus, who ruled between 63 BCE and CE 14, was the great-nephew of Julius Caesar. Little is left of the mausoleum, which was built around 28 BCE.



Nero erected his Domus Aurea – a 300-room personal palace he used solely for entertaining - in the heart of ancient Rome in CE 64. Its ruins offer a rare glimpse into the rarified world of a Roman emperor. In front of the palace, Nero placed a 100-foot statue of himself known as the Colossus Neronis.





The Colosseum - one of the most impressive structures in Rome - reaches a height of more than 159 feet and was originally clad in marble. Built by Vespasian in CE 72, it was completed in CE 80, the year the emperor died, and could accommodate more than 55,000 people.



Though a portion of its exterior walls have crumbled through time, the Colosseum nevertheless retains traces of its former glory. A mammoth oval stadium, 620 feet long and 513 feet wide, its steeply graded tiers of stone benches once accommodated an estimated 50,000 to 80,000 spectators; the arena itself measured 287 by 180 feet.



The Arch of Titus, which stands near the Colosseum and the Roman Forum, was built by Emperor Domitian to commemorate the victories of his elder brother, his predecessor. The arch, which was dedicated in CE 81 soon after Titus's death, is adorned with depictions of the spoils of the Temple of Jerusalem, which Titus destroyed upon his siege and sack of the city in 70 CE.



Domus Augustana, the name for one wing of the magnificent, marble-floored, two-story palace built in CE 92 by Domitian on the Palatine Hill, was used as the private residence of many of Rome's emperors. Its courtyard, square-shaped fountain, and some of the buildings walls remain intact.





The Flavian Palace, also situated on the Palatine Hill, was used by Rome's emperors for official state functions. Built by the emperor Domitian in CE 92, little remains of the massive, three-part structure other than a few fountains in its courtyard.



The largest and most famous gladiator training school in Rome, Ludus Magnus is situated near the Coliseum. It was built between CE 81 and 96 on the order of Domitian and rebuilt between CE 98 and 117 during the reign of Trajan.



Covering an area of about 250 acres, Hadrian's Villa, which dates to the first and second decades of the second century CE, is the best preserved Roman villa in the world. In its heyday, it housed some thirty buildings and many fascinating monuments, as well as libraries, a colonnaded swimming pool, and a Maritime theater.



The massive Forum of Trajan - the last of its type constructed in Rome - was built between CE 107 and 112. The forum housed several public buildings and two libraries that once flanked Trajan's Column, the most important structure on the site, and served as the administrative center of Rome.





Trajan's Column, a marble monolith standing 126 feet high, was dedicated in CE 113 to celebrate Trajan's lucrative victory - the booty included 500 pounds of gold and a million pounds of silver - in the Dacian Wars. The details inscribed on the column include friezes featuring 2,662 figures in 155 scenes; Trajan appears in fifty-eight of them.



As famous as the Coliseum, the Pantheon is one of the most well-preserved sites in Rome. Built in 25 BCE by Marcus Agrippa as a temple dedicated to Rome's most illustrious gods, it burnt to the ground in CE 80. Hadrian rebuilt it in CE 125; that structure is pictured above.



The Temple of Venus stands at the east end of the Roman Forum near of the Coliseum. Dating from CE 135, it is believed that the emperor Hadrian participated in its design. The temple, thought to be the largest in ancient Rome, initially had two main chambers.

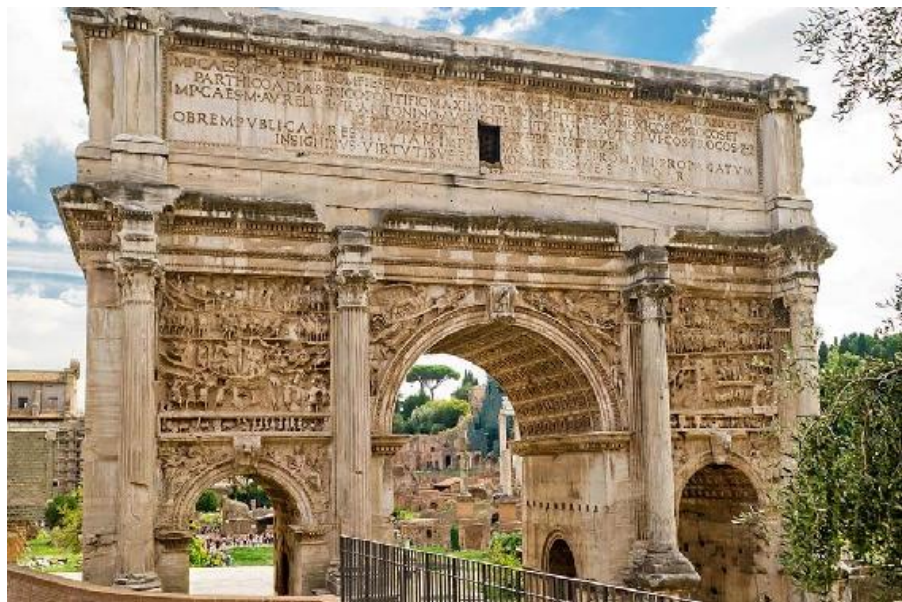


The Sant Angelo Castle, completed in CE 139, was built as a mausoleum for the emperor Hadrian. When the emperor Flavius Augustus Honorius decided to incorporate it into Rome's Aurelian Walls, many of the mausoleum's contents disappeared. It later became a stronghold and eventually a prison.





This temple, which dates to CE 141, was built by the emperor Antoninus Pius to honor his wife, Faustina, who was deified after her death. Twenty years later, upon his death, Antoninus was also deified, and his name was added to the temple. The structure is now part of the San Lorenzo in Miranda, a seventeenth-century Baroque guild church.



The white marble Arch of Septimius Severus has survived the battle with time and the elements and can be admired in the Roman Forum. Built in CE 203, it commemorates the victories of the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus and his two sons against the Parthian Empire between CE 194 and 199.



The Baths of Diocletian, completed in CE 306, could accommodate as many as 3,000 people at a time. Following the typical design of Roman times, it contains a frigidarium, tepidarium and caldarium, large bathing chambers, and gymnasiums.



The Basilica Maxentius, the largest structure in the Roman Forum, still has its roof and three of its arches and vaults. Construction on the building, which served as a meeting house for judicial and administrative officials, began in CE 308, when Rome was ruled by Maxentius, and was completed in CE 313.





The sixty-nine-foot-high Arch of Constantine, built on the order of Constantine the Great in CE 315, honors the emperor's victory in the 312 Battle of Milvian Bridge. This largest and last of the Roman triumphal arches, which stands next to the Colosseum, has survived the centuries relatively unscathed.



The Arch of Janus, which dates to the early fourth century CE, boasts four faces, making it unique among the arches of Rome. Built of brick and faced with marble slabs, it was dedicated to Constantine the Great and stands on four broad pillars near the Colosseum and the Roman Forum.



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